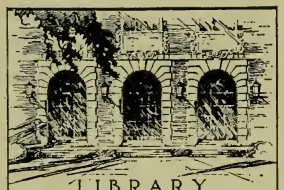
MATRIMONY



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MATRIMONY.

BY

W. E. NORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MATRIMONY.

CHAPTER I.

TWO YOUNG MEN.

If circumstances should ever lead me to wish for a place in the legislative assembly of my country, I think I should like to sit for Beachborough in the Conservative interest. I cannot imagine a more desirable constituency for one who should understand how to deal with it; and, knowing the place as I have done from my childhood, I flatter myself that I could content the electors with the least possible amount of personal inconvenience. I should never think of addressing them collectively upon political questions, because it would be clearly understood between us that I was upon the right side, whereas the radical minority must, in the nature of things, be upon the

wrong, and that it would therefore be a mere waste of time for us to harass one another with matters of detail. All that I should do would be to dress myself very nicely; to saunter up and down the Esplanade, with a beaming aspect, on summer afternoons; to subscribe to the local charities, the band fund, and the harriers; to let it be known that I was upon terms of intimacy with the county families; and, if possible, to show myself occasionally in public arm-in-arm with the Bishop of Lynchester. It would also be advisable to address the House briefly from time to time, so as to give the *Beachborough Chronicle* an opportunity for observing: "We would direct the attention of our readers to the terse and stirring language in which our respected borough member, who is ever at his post when questions of national importance are to the fore, supported the Chancellor of the Exchequer's bill for the extension of the county franchise. Those whose eyes are not blinded by the dust of spite and faction will peruse with genuine delight these utterances of one who, while yielding to no man in veneration for the constitution handed down to us by our forefathers, is yet as quick as his illustrious chief to perceive the reforms called for by the progress of the age, and will hail

Mr. Knowles as emphatically the right man in the right place."

If, in addition to all this, I could induce my grandmother to buy her eternal grey silk gowns on the spot, instead of having them sent down from London, my popularity would, I feel, be simply unassailable.

The picture is not without its allurements, and I declare that there are times when I could wish I had a little more ambition, and that old Mr. Pettigrew, who has represented the borough for the last quarter of a century, would see the propriety of spending his remaining years in a well-earned repose. As for one's constituents, they would give one no bother at all. They are not the sort of people to come clamouring for the construction of a gigantic breakwater at the national expense, seeing that their little harbour is amply large enough for their requirements; and they have no railway grievances to be redressed, nor, indeed, to the best of my belief, any grievances at all. So long as a regiment of infantry occupies the barracks at West Hill, so long as the summer season brings a sufficiency of visitors to the spick-and-span lodging-houses which line the sea front, so long as the annual regatta, the annual steeple-chases, and the monthly balls at the Assembly

Rooms succeed one another with pleasing regularity, Beachborough will doubtless continue to be satisfied with its lot, and will consider itself —to quote the language used by the worshipful the Mayor at a recent banquet—"the 'andsomest, the 'ealthiest, and I will add, gentlemen, the '*appiest* watering-place in the south of England."

At the same time, I am not prepared to say that I should care to live at Beachborough all the year round. The tittle-tattle of the old ladies over their afternoon tea, the shilling and half-crown whist and the sixpenny pool at the club, the broad after-dinner pleasantries of Admiral Bagshawe and General Blair, the wrangles between the low-church rector of Trinity and the ritualist incumbent of St. Veronica's, the shocking conduct of Captain Brown and Miss Smith,—all these exciting accompaniments of existence would, I think, begin to pall upon one before very long. I picture to myself some luckless wight, forced by poverty or other causes to dwell year after year in the midst of this sounding emptiness, and I can fancy how, as time went on and the humours of the place utterly ceased to divert him, he would grow to feel more and more like the poor starling in Sterne's "Sentimental

Journey," and how at last—perhaps on some chilly spring morning, when the wind was in the east, and the sea was of a dirty grey colour, and all other objects had a parched blackness—he would begin to look in an odd, sidelong way at his razors. For me, however, who am but a frequent and flying visitor, the bright little town has never possessed any such gloomy associations, but, on the contrary, an invigorating freshness, as of its own salt-smelling air, endeared to me by a hundred memories of childhood, boyhood, and maturer years. Some of my relations, who are not prone to err on the side of leniency in their judgments upon their neighbours, are pleased to say that I should not be so often seen in Beachborough if my grandmother, who is notoriously well-to-do and can dispose of her fortune by will in any way she may think fit, did not happen to reside there; but let that pass. I confess to a sneaking fondness for the place. I hear other people denounce it as a vulgar, scandalous, dull little seaside town; but I can't say that it presents itself to me quite in that light. I like to escape, every now and then, from the noise and smoke of Piccadilly to the breezy Esplanade, where every other person I meet stops to shake hands with me, and the lounging boatmen grin and touch

their hats as I pass; I like my grandmother's solemn, old-fashioned dinner-parties, and the more lively festivities at the Assembly Rooms; and as I am now an old bachelor of forty-five years *bien sonnés*, I have ceased to be over-exacting in the matter of personal amusement, or, at least, can derive as much thereof as will content me from studying the virtues and failings of my fellow-creatures—a species of relaxation for the pursuit of which Beachborough offers special advantages.

After the incidental admission made in the last paragraph, I need scarcely say that I shall not figure in the ensuing history, save as an occasional bystander; for who ever heard of a hero of five-and-forty? I shall retire modestly to my proper place in the background so soon as I shall have managed to introduce the real heroes and heroines; and these, when they make their entrance, will be found to be as young as can possibly be desired. If I could bring them, their relations and their friends, forward in a body without further delay, briefly stating their names and their relative positions, after the fashion of the list of *dramatis personæ* on the first page of a play, I should save myself a good deal of trouble and the conscientious reader some weariness; but the unwritten

canons of the art of story-telling do not appear to allow of such a method; and I have that confidence in the judgment of the novel-reading public that I feel assured that one and all will unhesitatingly skip any preliminary details that may seem likely to be tedious. I will therefore jog on in my own way and with such abilities as Heaven has granted to me, starting at the very beginning with that sunny June afternoon when the *Siren* came into harbour with Claud Gervis on board.

It was on that day that I arrived on one of my periodical visits to Beachborough, and as I drove from the station to South Crescent, where my grandmother lives, I passed under a triumphal arch of evergreens, inscribed with the word "Welcome" in very large gilt letters, and noticed that nearly every house in the High Street had a banner floating from its first-floor windows. Mr. Hicks, the butler, with whom I have an acquaintance of many years' standing, explained the reason of these festive displays to me, while unpacking my portmanteau.

"The yeomanry is here, sir," said he; "and it was thought that the town ought to give them a proper reception, so as to get them down again another year, which is good for

trade, sir, you see. They ain't a-bin here—let me see—not for five years now. Lord Lynchester, he don't like the place, I understand. Says it's too dam respectable to suit him—ha, ha, ha! Dear, dear! those orficers, they *are* an owdacious lot! There's his lordship, and Sir Frederick Croft, and young Mr. Pilkington from Somerley, you know, sir, and half a dozen more; and the way they've a-bin carryin' on and the games they've a-bin up to you wouldn't believe. They has their mess at the Courtney Arms, and they tell me there's that noise and hollerin' and shoutin' a-goin' on up to three o'clock in the mornin', that nobody can't get a wink of sleep. Mr. Stubbs, he don't like it. He says havin' such a pack of Bedliamites in his house don't do him no good; and a fifty-pun' note won't cover the damage they've a-done, let alone takin' all the boots from outside the doors and chuckin' of 'em out o' winder in the rain, and such-like. I see Sir Frederick a-walkin' on the Esplanade with some young ladies this mornin', sir, and he come across the road and arst if you was here. Wilkins, the butcher, sir, he come off his horse on parade yesterday and bruised hisself rather bad, so they tell me. They did think at first he'd broke his leg; but his lordship hollers

out, 'Take him away; he's too fat to hurt. And serve you dam well right, Wilkins,' he says arterwards; 'what do you want to get outside a horse for?' he says. 'Why, you can't get into the saddle without all your buttons flyin' off like a blessed foo de joy,' he says. They tell me Wilkins was terrible vexed. Well, well! Would you like a bottle of the Margaux or the Lafitte after dinner, sir, if you please?"

Hicks is garrulous, but he is a useful creature, and it is well to keep upon good terms with him. I said we would have the Lafitte; and then, after paying my respects in the drawing-room, sauntered down towards the club, where I knew I should meet some old friends, and hear all the latest local intelligence.

And, sure enough, as soon as I reached the pretty little house, with its green Venetian blinds and its spacious verandah facing the sea, the first object I saw was the yellow waistcoat of Admiral Bagshawe, and above it his rubicund visage, which just now had assumed a somewhat richer tinge than usual. The Admiral was standing on the steps, with his back to the door, holding forth to a small group of fellow-members, and was evidently very angry.

"Pooh, pooh! Stuff and nonsense! Don't

talk to me!" I heard him saying; and I was aware, from long experience, that these ejaculations were merely as it were the exordium of a discourse, and did not imply that any one had really had the audacity to argue with the admiral. "I'm on the committee of this club, and I intend to see that the regulations of this club are observed. And so I shall precious soon let my young gentleman know, I can tell you. I shan't make any bones about it; I shall simply say, 'Now look here. We make you hon'ry members of this club, and we show you hospitality while you're here, and we expect you to conform to the reg'lations of this club. Now let me direct your attention to rule six. If you think that, because you're a lord, you're going to be allowed to set reg'lations at defiance, you're very much mistaken, my young friend. And if you want to play old Harry and make a tom-fool of yourself, you'd better go to some pot-house and do it there, because it isn't going to be permitted in this club. So now you know.'"

And with that the Admiral faced about and stumped upstairs towards the card-room, never having vouchsafed me the smallest recognition.

"What is it all about?" I inquired, after I had shaken hands with the others, who remained clustered round the doorway.

"Oh," answered one of them, "it seems that Lord Lynchester and some of his friends were in here last night, playing loo up to all hours, and I.O.U.'s were flying about pretty thickly towards the end of the time. The Admiral says that kind of thing is a disgrace to the club and is against the rules, which is true enough, I believe. But the fact of the matter is, that he hasn't had a card for the yeomanry ball."

"I don't think," said Mr. Pender (late political agent at Nuggerpore), "that Admiral Bagshawe is the sort of man to be influenced by any feeling of that kind. I have known Bagshawe for a good many years, and I certainly do not think that he would be likely to be annoyed at not having been invited to a ball where he would meet every tradesman in the town; nor, as far as that goes, that he would care to take his wife and daughters to such an entertainment at all. At the same time, I am bound to say that these yeomanry officers appear to have strange notions of returning hospitality. I do not attend balls myself, and should not have gone to this one if I had been asked; but I think that I ought to have received an invitation. And I have not received an invitation."

Mr. Pender is a tall, thin, dyspeptic-looking

man, who habitually speaks in deliberate, melancholy accents, and his voice, as he announced the unaccountable slight put upon him, was almost tragic. He gives very good dinners; and perhaps that was why the first speaker, a captain in the 121st Fusileers, at that time quartered at Beachborough, responded so readily—

"Not sent you an invitation, Mr. Pender? Oh, there must be some mistake, you know; they couldn't possibly have intended to leave you out. I know young Croft a little, and I'll mention it to him."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind, Captain Harrison," returned Mr. Pender, with great dignity. "I should consider it most imp —ha—hum—I should be very much annoyed if you were to bring my name forward in that way. It is perfectly clear to me that these gentlemen think themselves too good for Beachborough society, and I can only say it is a great pity that they should have chosen this place for their annual training. Next year, let us hope, they will make a better selection. They will not be missed—they will not be missed."

And a club waiter coming out at this moment, with Admiral Bagshawe's compliments to Mr. Pender, and would he be so kind as to say

whether he intended to play whist that afternoon or whether he didn't, the group broke up; and I, following in the wake of the majority, found myself presently in the billiard-room, where two gentlemen in their shirt sleeves were playing pyramids, and where some dozen or so more were regaling themselves with tobacco and one another with the latest gossip.

Is it only old women who spread scandal, and whisper away characters, and find means of laying an extra coat of black paint on to the darkest reputations? I think I know certain persons of the other sex whose bald heads cover brains as small and as active, whose eyes peer through their spectacles at quite as many wonderful sights, and whose tongues wag no less pleasantly behind their false teeth. And if any one is of opinion that those who listen to backbiting are themselves in some sort backbiters, I beg to reply that I am a student of human nature, in which capacity I am compelled to put up with much that is disagreeable to me, and further, that I never believe a word that one man or woman tells me about another.

With a quiet conscience, therefore, I seated myself upon one of the leather-covered benches in the billiard-room, and in less than five minutes' time had heard how Lord Lynchester had been

seen driving in the country with a yellow-haired lady, who certainly wasn't Lady Lynchester; how Pilkington, of Somerley, hadn't paid his tradesmen for three years; how that old reprobate Lushington hadn't been sober for two hours together since the yeomanry went out; and how young Croft had broken his mother's heart by engaging himself to a Miss Lambert, a vulgar girl from nobody knew where, who had followed him to Beachborough, and simply insisted upon his marrying her.

I had just taken in this last item of news when a young man entered the room, of whom, as the reader will hear a good deal of him in the course of this narrative, it may be well to give some brief description. I don't know that I ever heard anybody call Freddy Croft good-looking; but, on the other hand, I cannot call to mind a single instance of a stranger having failed to be attracted by him. The word attractive, indeed, seems to hit him off better than any other; for I take it that nine people out of ten feel instinctively drawn towards a young fellow who has the conventional attributes of his age—a well-knit, vigorous frame, a clear complexion, laughing eyes, and a countenance which proclaims aloud that its owner is wholly unacquainted with care. There are certain

youths who are like the very embodiment of youth : it is impossible to look at them without feeling young again one's self for the moment ; and one is naturally disposed to shake hands with anybody who can bestow upon one so agreeable a sensation. Freddy Croft's fair hair, which curled obstinately, in spite of being cut as close to his head as the scissors would go, his blue eyes, and the half-innocent, half-mischievous expression of his boyish face, made him at all events a pleasant object to look upon, and went far to atone for a decided irregularity of feature ; and if in stature he fell somewhat short of even the medium standard, he was too well put together for this to count as a serious defect. He strolled into the room, chewing a toothpick, stood for a moment with his legs very wide apart, looking at the billiard players, and then, becoming aware of my humble person, exclaimed—

"By Jove! There's old Knowles. How are you, Knowles? I thought it wouldn't be Beachborough if you didn't turn up somewhere."

I said I had just arrived from London, and inquired after Lady Croft.

"Oh, she's all right," answered the young man, a momentary cloud passing over his brow. "She's down here ; and Florry too. I say,

come out and take a turn on the Esplanade; you can't like sticking in this stuffy place on a fine summer's afternoon."

Certainly it was pleasanter out of doors than in. A brisk breeze from the south was chasing little white-crested waves across the blue expanse of the bay; the wooded hills that rise to the westward of the town were half in sunlight, half in shadow; the band of the 121st, installed beneath a freshly painted and gilt kiosk, was playing a selection of airs from "Les Cloches de Corneville," and the *élite* of the resident gentry and visitors (to borrow the favourite expression of the *Beachborough Chronicle*) were promenading slowly up and down within earshot of these lively strains. We joined the crowd; and my companion was pleased to be extremely facetious at the expense of some of its members.

"I'll trouble you for those two girls with the frizzed hair!—did you ever see anything like them out of the Zoo? Well, they're the beauties of Beachborough, and some of those 121st fellows are always after them. That parasol with the white lace that the one on the off side is carrying is a joint affair: she and her sister have it turn and turn about. I know, because, the other day, while they

were sitting down, I came behind them and dropped a spark from a fusee on to it, so as to recognize it again. Here comes General Blair, with his wife in her purple silk. By Jove! I shouldn't care to be in the General's shoes. Do you know why she always wears her bonnet and cap-strings tied under her chin, like that? Why, because she has a beard three inches long. She has, really. Pilkington saw it the other night at a dinner-party, and he swears it gave him the jumps to that extent that he couldn't eat a thing afterwards. Look at old Miss Pennefather prancing along, with her nose in the air. That old girl will have a bad accident one of these days if she will go on carrying her head so high, and not looking where she's going to. Somebody asked my mother to call upon her last year, and a week afterwards she turned up at Croft to return the visit—drove all the way in a one-horse fly. We were sitting in the music-room—you know the room; you go down three steps into it—when she arrived. In she comes, all smiles, tossing her old head and holding out both her hands,—never sees the steps—comes down with no end of a clatter on her nose and knees—recovers herself badly, staggers on for a yard and a half, and then

hurls herself into the arms of old Courtney, who was sitting bolt upright in his chair as usual, and sends his hat spinning in one direction and his tea-cup in another. You ought to have seen Courtney's face. I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred pounds."

And at the recollection of this delightful episode Freddy broke into a peal of laughter which might have been heard from one end of the Esplanade to the other. The passers-by smiled back upon him good-naturedly enough, and seemed to take no offence when these outbursts of merriment were renewed again and again, though I fear that it must have been sufficiently obvious, from the manner in which my light-hearted friend nudged me with his elbow and even pointed with his stick, that the subjects of his jokes were not very far away. Beachborough is nothing if not decorous, and I have little doubt that if a member of its own society—myself, for instance, or one of the officers of the 121st—had chosen to behave in this obstreperous fashion, he would have been made to feel that he was misconducting himself; but a baronet with large estates in the county is a privileged person and, indeed, it was only a few days later that Miss Pennefather asked me whether I did not

think Sir Frederick Croft a delightful young man. "So unaffected, and so full of fun," she said.

For my own part, it amused me very well to lean against the iron railings, with my back to the sea, and listen to my companion's candid remarks upon the ladies and gentlemen who defiled past us, though I confess that their appearance did not move me to laughter quite so easily as it did him—perhaps because I knew them all so well. But at length two total strangers hove in sight, and I was roused to attempt a little criticism on my own score.

"Who on earth can that over-dressed old woman be?" says I, not very prudently. "The young lady with the startling complexion and the finely developed bust is her daughter, no doubt. Have they come down here with designs upon the regular army or the auxiliary forces, I wonder?"

Freddy's countenance changed a little. "Oh, those are the Lamberts," said he. "Awfully nice people. I'll introduce you, if you like."

So this was the "vulgar girl from nobody knew where," and her mamma. I got a bow, or rather a nod, from each of the ladies when my name was mentioned; but neither of them appeared to think my original observation on

the fineness of the afternoon worthy of notice, and they turned their whole attention forthwith to my neighbour, whom they, so to speak, surrounded and took possession of in a somewhat ostentatious manner.

"We have been looking for you *everywhere*, Sir Frederick," said the elder of them reproachfully. "I am afraid you forget your appointments very easily."

"Never, Mrs. Lambert, I assure you. I couldn't be *everywhere*, could I? but if you had looked for me on the Esplanade, where we arranged to meet, you would have found me vainly sweeping the horizon in search of you with Knowles's eye-glass: wouldn't she, Knowles? And here have I been for the last three quarters of an hour."

"Oh, Sir Frederick, Sir Frederick! we arranged to meet at the end of the pier, as you know very well. Perhaps you made *two* appointments, and we are interfering with some one else who is looking out for you. Shall we go home and leave him, Kate?"

"Nonsense, mamma," returned Miss Lambert, briskly. She was certainly a handsome young woman, though it was obvious that she had made use of art to enhance the charms bestowed upon her by Nature. "Where shall we walk?"

she continued, addressing my young friend, who, with his elbows resting on the railings, was contemplating her admiringly. "Shall we go down to the harbour and see the yacht that came in this afternoon? I want to have a nearer view of her, and I am sick of hearing the band play."

"All right," answered Freddy, laconically, straightening himself up, and stepping to her side.

And so the pair coolly marched off, leaving me to follow them with the duenna. I did not want to walk with Mrs. Lambert; neither, to judge by her manner, did she particularly want to walk with me; but one can't always select one's companions in this world, and I thought it would be rather too ill-natured to face to the rightabout, and let the old woman choose between playing gooseberry or loitering behind alone. Moreover, I am not easily bored, and can amuse myself by watching the ways of old, as well as of young women. This one belonged to the class which flourishes in watering-places and is to be found in great profusion, during the summer months, at Swiss *tables-d'hôte* and German springs. She wore a great many bracelets; a broad gold chain, from which a locket depended, encircled her throat;

her pale yellow gloves were too tight for her, and were a little grimy about the knuckles; she moved with a slow, majestic gait, and allowed her dress to trail in the dust. As she knew nothing about the stranger to whom she had just been introduced, she was pleased to adopt a strictly guarded attitude, receiving my advances with some hauteur, and being careful to give tone to her remarks by many references to the peerage. I always make it a rule to suit my conversation to my company, so whenever she mentioned her dear friend Lady This, I promptly retorted with my aunt the Marchioness of That; and thus we advanced, upon terms of mutual distrust, till we reached the quay, beside which the beautiful *Siren* was lying, with her sails still in confusion on her deck.

When we came up, Freddy, who knows about as much of ship-building as he does of Sanscrit, was bending down to survey the yacht's lines, with his hands on his knees and that unnaturally wise expression on his face which I have seen him assume when asked to give an opinion upon a horse, while Miss Lambert was exclaiming, in a loud voice, "What lovely white decks! what a charming broad staircase!—companion, one ought to call it, oughtn't one? I *must* know who the owner is;

I should like to make his acquaintance. Do call that man, Sir Frederick, and ask him who his master his."

"Take care," said Freddy, looking rather alarmed; "they'll hear you on board."

"Well, and if they do? I suppose they won't run out and bite me, will they? I'll ask myself, if you are too shy. I say, my man, what is your master's name?"

The weather-beaten, good-humoured-looking skipper who was thus unceremoniously hailed, advanced to the side, looked up at his fair questioner with some amusement and a good deal of admiration, raised his finger to his gold-laced cap, and answered, "Mr. Gervis, miss."

"Jervis, Jervis," soliloquized Mrs. Lambert, whose voice was as loud as, and rather deeper than her daughter's. "I know all Lord Castlecourt's family; but they call themselves *Jarvis*. There are the Jervoises of——"

But at this point Mrs. Lambert faltered and stopped short; for, while she had been speaking, a young man had appeared at the top of the companion, and it was evident that her speculations had been overheard.

"We spell our name with a G.," said he composedly. "I don't know whether that will help you at all."

I hope Mrs. Lambert felt as uncomfortable for the next few seconds as I did; but the awkwardness of the situation was put an end to by an exclamation from Freddy.

"By Jove! then it's the man himself! I was wondering whether by any chance it could be you. Gervis, old boy, don't you know me?"

"Why, I do believe it's little Croft!" cried the other, after a moment of hesitation.

"Of course it is. Where on earth have you been hiding yourself all these years? Nobody seems to have heard a word of you since you left Eton. I thought you must be dead—I did, really."

"Oh, I have been abroad," answered the yachtsman, who had now stepped on shore, and while he and his former school-fellow were shaking hands and questioning one another, I had time to form a guess at his identity.

With the exception of my grandmother, I suppose that no one in Beachborough was ever upon speaking terms with old Colonel Gervis. He was an awful and somewhat mysterious personage, who used to strike terror into my boyish soul, upon the rare occasions of his visits to South Crescent, by glaring at me in silence, and then asking me abruptly how long it was since I had been flogged, and who, in after

years, never deigned to take any notice of me at all. I have heard the story of his life scores of times from my grandmother; but it is not relevant to the matter in hand, and readers shall not be troubled with it. All that Beachborough knew of him was that he was a soured, ill-tempered old man, who had quarrelled with all his friends, and who dwelt in complete solitude at Southlands, his house on the hill behind the town, seldom stirring beyond his own park gates, and admitting no visitors within them. All sorts of stories were current about his eccentric habits, his supposed great wealth, and so forth; but the man lived so entirely apart, that even Beachborough could not find much to say about him, and less interest was felt in him personally than in the question of who would succeed to his property at his death. As to whether Southlands was entailed or not there was some uncertainty; but it had been ascertained that the old gentleman had a half-brother living; and with regard to this half-brother, rumours of a not very satisfactory kind were afloat. Some people, it is true, averred that he was nothing worse than a valetudinarian, who had fixed his residence abroad from considerations of health; but the majority inclined to the belief that, if he had not been trans-

ported for felony, he had at least been compelled to fly the country by reason of his debts; and, as Admiral Bagshawe would often remark, "A man doesn't keep away from England summer and winter unless there's a good reason for it. Don't tell me. Has anybody ever seen the fellow's face, or heard of anybody else who has?" This was felt to be very nearly conclusive.

Now, at the time when this story opens, Colonel Gervis had been dead some months, and if I had been in Beachborough during that period, I should doubtless have heard many a bold surmise and authoritative statement as to the advent of the heir. Having been absent, I had not given the subject much thought; but now it did not require the deep mourning in which this young yachtsman was clad to convince me that some relation of the defunct misanthrope had appeared upon the scene at last. And presently all doubt was removed by a remark of Freddy's which I overheard.

"And so you have come to take possession of Southlands, eh?"

To which the other replied, "Well, I have come to try and get things in order a little."

Mrs. Lambert, who had been listening eagerly to the colloquy between the two friends,

here glanced involuntarily towards the heights on the further side of the harbour, where the chimneys of Southlands could be distinguished above an intervening belt of trees.

"Is he the heir to that charming place?" she whispered. "How very handsome he is! —don't you think so? And so—so—odd and striking-looking."

The good lady had forgotten all her high-and-mightiness in her thirst for information, and I perceived at once that she must have more than one marriageable daughter on hand. Looking at the new comer with more dispassionate eyes than hers, I could not but concur in her admiring opinion of his outer man. I sometimes think that Claud Gervis at the age of three and twenty was as perfect a specimen of manly beauty as I have ever looked upon. Any one who chooses to stroll from the Palazzo di Venezia to the Porta del Popolo on a fine winter's afternoon, will probably meet two or three faces in the course of his walk which might belong to Claud's twin brother. He will encounter the same regular features, the same soft dark eyes, the same oval contour, and the same clear brown complexion; but it will be strange if he discover upon those placid Roman countenances any trace of that bright vitality

and perceptiveness which caused people to turn and look at young Gervis a second time in a crowd ; nor is he likely to see beneath them the counterpart of Claud's lithe, wiry figure. The lad puzzled and interested me. He had the head of an Italian poet ; but his limbs, his movements, and his clothes were those of an Englishman. He looked as if he might be a joint product of both countries—which was the less surprising, seeing that that was precisely what he was.

After a time, I found myself returning towards the sea front with my old woman, of whose company I was becoming very tired, while the three young ones strolled on ahead ; but soon the new arrival, suspecting perhaps that he was impeding the progress of a flirtation, fell back and joined us. Mrs. Lambert, who had recovered quickly from the embarrassment occasioned by the manner of her introduction to this eligible youth, attacked him at once.

"I am so glad to have met you, Mr. Gervis," said she, turning upon him a venerable figure-head wreathed in smiles ; "because, do you know, ever since we have been in Beachborough, we have been longing so much to see that lovely place of yours. Now that you have

come, I hope you will be very kind, and let us walk round the gardens some day. Flowers are quite a mania of mine—flowers, and—and—shrubs, and——"

"Turf?" suggested the young man. "One generally finds all three in English gardens, and I dare say you will find them at Southlands. On the other hand, there may be no garden at all. I can't say myself, because I never was there."

"Really! This is your first visit to your domains, then? How anxious you must be to see your future home! The late owner, I think, was your——"

"My uncle: quite right. He was half-brother to my father, who is the present proprietor of the place you admire so much. I have come on here to make preparations for his arrival."

"Oh!" Mrs. Lambert could not keep a slight tinge of disappointment out of her voice. But, upon reflection, she brightened up again. "You are an only son, are you not?" said she.

The young fellow laughed outright. "I am at present," he answered; "but I have a step-mother, as you are perhaps aware. I had no idea that people knew so much about us in

Beachborough." Then he turned away from her, and addressed himself to me. "I have a letter of introduction in my pocket to Mrs. Knowles from my father," he said. "Do you think I might call and deliver it to-morrow? He told me that she was a very old friend of his, and that I was to be sure and find her out at once."

"Come this evening," I responded heartily, seeing a chance of escape from that terrible old Lambert woman; "my grandmother will be delighted to see you."

"But is it not too late?"

"Oh, dear, no; we don't dine till eight, and it is only a few minutes' walk to South Crescent. Good-bye, Mrs. Lambert; good-night, Freddy." And I hurried my new friend away, without allowing him time to excuse himself. *Sic me servavit Apollo.*

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD LADY.

My grandmother, dear old lady, is considered on all hands to be a rather alarming personage; and though I, for one, have good reason to know that her bark is worse than her bite, and that there are few kinder hearts or more liberal hands in England than hers, yet I cannot but admit that she has in some degree earned her character. Nobody, indeed, can be expected to feel very grateful for the negative benefit of not having been bitten, while it is undeniably a positive nuisance to be barked at; nor do I wonder at the unwillingness of those whose failings lie upon the surface to pay frequent visits in South Crescent. Woe unto those who lisp in their speech, lounge back in their chairs, or deliver themselves of affected sentiments in my grandmother's presence! If they are not lowered several pegs in their self-esteem before

they leave the room, the fault will assuredly not lie with that ruthless disciplinarian. I have not forgotten the occasion upon which I incautiously took a friend, who was about to set out upon the now fashionable journey round the world, to one of her afternoon tea-parties, thinking the old lady would feel an interest in so enterprising a traveller, and quite forgetting, for the moment, that he belonged to that class of languid, used-up young men whom she honours with a special measure of contempt.

"And pray, sir, what route do you propose to follow?" she inquired, after taking a grim survey of his well-cut clothes, his patent-leather shoes, and his striped silk stockings.

He looked up, with an evident sense of injury at being called upon to undertake the fatigue of explanations, and began a vague sketch of his programme. First, he said, he should "go to Indiah—get some shooting, perhaps—knock about there for a little. Might go on to Japan afterwards, or Chinah——"

"Oh no, you mustn't go to China," interrupted my grandmother gravely.

"Something to do," suggested the unsuspecting one. "Might as well go there as anywhere else. Why not?"

"I'm told they eat puppies there," says Mrs.

Knowles in a loud, clear voice. Her snubs are for the most part of this direct description. One could as easily affect not to notice a slap in the face; and the unfortunate at whom they are launched has to choose between accepting his chastisement in silence and making himself ridiculous by getting up and taking his leave forthwith. At the time when my revered grandmother mixed a good deal in society, she was considered, I believe, to have a very pretty wit; and if, in the effort to say smart things, she sometimes succeeded only in uttering rude ones, I dare say she merely followed the custom of a generation somewhat more thick-skinned than ours. Nowadays we have forgotten how to be witty; and though doubtless we can be sufficiently rude, after our own fashion, when we please, I think we have learnt to be a little more tolerant of the infirmities of our neighbours, and to see that it really is not worth while, for the sake of setting down one obnoxious person, to make a whole roomful of people uncomfortable. For my own part, I declare that I feel so nervous whenever my grandmother is entertaining strangers, that I have long ago abandoned the responsibility of introducing any to her; and I thought it only prudent to speak a word or two of warn-

ing to this odd, foreign-looking young Gervis as we drew nearer to our destination.

"You will find my grandmother a little eccentric," I said. "She will very likely make some personal remarks about you; but I hope you won't mind. She is very old, you see, and everybody lets her have her own way."

"I know," answered the young fellow, laughing. "The governor told me all about her; and I think she is just the sort of old person whom I should like beyond everything."

"Maybe so; but it don't follow that *you* are the sort of young person whom *she* will like beyond everything," thinks I to myself, as Mr. Hicks and a subordinate in a striped waistcoat flung back the double doors to admit us.

As it turned out, however, I need not have felt any misgivings. My young gentleman stepped across the long drawing-room, made his bow, and introduced himself with a happy mixture of ease and respect; and I perceived at once that he was not likely to get himself into trouble by the perpetration of solecisms. Mrs. Knowles has always confessed to a weakness for handsome men; and it may have been her visitor's good looks, as well as his good manners, that prepossessed her in his favour. Or possibly the sound of his name may have

softened her with the stirring of some ancient memories. It was, at all events, evident that she intended to be gracious to him; and soon they were deep in conversation.

"An old friend? Oh yes, your father is a very old friend of mine in the sense that we were friends in very old days. To be sure, we haven't seen much of one another for a trifle of forty years or so; but we Careys and Gervises used to be almost like one family when the century was young. Poor George, who died the other day, was my contemporary; Vincent was many years younger. Long after I was married to Mr. Knowles, and settled down at Stone Hall with half a dozen children to bring up, I remember him as a merry young fellow, riding over from Southlands on summer afternoons, and making us all laugh with his stories of the pranks he and his friends played at Oxford and in London. My husband used to shake his head over it all; and as for old Mr. Gervis—who didn't like paying long bills, you understand—he used to swear Vincent would end upon the gallows; but I always liked him and stood up for him. He was a most amusing rascal and a great chatterbox in those days. You don't recognize that description of your father, eh? Ah, well! time

and trouble make changes in us all; and some of us grow silent, and some, like myself, become babblers in our old age. You are not much like a Gervis in face."

"No; I believe not. I suppose I take more after my mother."

"Who was an Italian. Yes, yes; to be sure. An heiress too, if I am not mistaken. After Vincent went into the diplomatic service we didn't see much of him in these parts; but I well remember the news of his marriage coming, and old Mr. Gervis saying, in his grumpy way, 'Well, he has feathered his nest anyhow, and that's something; but he may as well turn foreigner himself now; for his wife shan't enter this house. I'll have no papists here.' And he kept his word. You Gervises are an obstinate, wrong-headed lot, do you know?"

"I don't think my father is."

"H'm! I am not so sure of that. And so now he is coming back to Southlands, after all. Does he mean to live here?"

"Ah, that I can't say. I hope he will; but I don't think he likes England much; and as for Varinka, I doubt whether anything would induce her to make her home out of Paris."

"And, pray, who is Varinka?"

"Oh, my step-mother. We always call her by her Christian name—I don't know why, except that, of course, she is so much nearer our own age than my father's."

"Ah, that Russian princess. I want to hear all about her. I have only seen your father once since his second marriage—that time when he came over to try if he could not hit it off with poor George, and failed. He was a good deal aged and altered then. Mr. Gervis, will you do a kindness to an inquisitive old woman, and stay and dine with us? I can't offer you French cooking; but Tom there, who is given to self-indulgence, will take care that you have a glass of good claret."

A murmur confirmatory of this promise rose from the arm-chair on the other side of the room, whence I had been idly contemplating the rather picturesque study formed by the figures of the old woman and the lad who sat, facing one another, in a bay-window, their respective profiles clearly defined against the waning light. I have said already that it would be hard to discover a finer specimen of humanity in its prime than Claud Gervis, and it may, I suppose, be added that the human subject in the final term of its career finds no less striking a representative in the person of Mrs. Knowles.

I doubt whether grandmamma was ever a beauty; her nose must always have been a trifle too long, her jaws too square, and her mouth too large. But I can imagine that when those sharp little grey eyes were surmounted by eyebrows somewhat less bushy, when the abundant snowy hair under that close-fitting quilled cap was black or dark brown, when the little bent figure was straight and strong, and the cheeks, which are sunken now and overspread by a network of delicately traced lines, with here and there a long, deep furrow among them, were round and firm,—I can imagine, I say, that at the time of the battle of Waterloo, Miss Carey may have wrought some havoc among hearts which are now lying cold and quiet in their several family vaults. Now, after a life-journey of over eighty years, Mrs. Knowles's faculties are still in fairly good working order. If she puts on spectacles to read with, she requires no such aid to observe all that goes on about her; her ears are as sharp as her tongue; she scorns easy-chairs; and I believe it is rather for the sake of effect than for use that she carries the stout, gold-headed stick with which Grandpapa Knowles used to support his steps in days gone by.

She and young Gervis sat there, in opposite

corners of the window, like allegorical representations of the Past and the Future striving to join hands across the gulf of the Present, and gazed at one another with a certain eager, wistful curiosity—or so, at least, it seemed to me. Every now and again in life some such chance meeting as this startles us with a sudden vision of what we have been, or shall be. Shadows from the half-forgotten years rise up and beckon to us reproachfully; but we cannot return to them: it is as much as we can do if we are able to stretch out our hands longingly towards them, while Time and Fate, inexorable taskmasters, hurry us along the road, at the end of which grim old age sits waiting for us. Nay, it is not even we who were young once, but some one else, who is no more. Who can resist the universal law of change, or stand still while the tread-mill goes round? One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; and there is one event unto all. I understand that we should wish our friends happiness, since it is undeniable that happiness is not dealt out in equal proportions to mankind; but surely it can only be in irony or thoughtlessness that we drink to their long life. Would you really like to be old? Would you like to linger on here, a worn-out mind inhabiting a worn-out

body, alone among strangers, feeling yourself an interloper, yet not caring greatly whether you were so or no, having outlived all that made life worth possessing, and, worst of all, contented, in a dull way, with your sad existence? Is it conceivable that any sane man, who believes in the immortality of the soul, can desire such a fate for himself or for those whom he loves? What must be, must; and, as science advances, length of years seems likely to fall to the lot of an increasing number among us; but it is a thing to be borne, not to be hoped for.

I was moralizing thus, with my usual originality and profundity, when that observation about the claret recalled me to myself and to a sense of physical emptiness, such as healthy men ought to feel towards half-past seven in the evening. Young Gervis was beginning to excuse himself upon the plea that there would hardly be time for him to go back to the yacht and dress; but my grandmother, who is accustomed to obedience, and never gives an invitation unless she intends it to be accepted, did not choose to let him off.

"Pooh, pooh!" she said, "you will do very well as you are, sir. Tom, show Mr. Gervis

a room where he can wash his hands, and tell them to lay another place." And so that matter was settled.

Between soup and dessert we heard all about the Gervis family—all, at least, that our guest chose to tell us; and I cannot say that, on this first evening, he struck me as being at all a reserved young man. Cross-examination is always more or less disagreeable, even to those who have nothing to conceal; but he submitted to it good-humouredly enough, answering without hesitation the questions put to him, and speaking in an easy, natural manner of his personal views and wishes. He had been sent straight to Eton, he said, as soon as he was old enough to go to school at all, and had there imbibed a love for his father's country and people which, it appeared, was by no means shared by that gentleman himself. "The governor likes foreigners and foreign life best," he sighed; "and I should like it all too, if I only had to go abroad for the holidays, you know, as I used to do. But one gets sick, in the long run, of knocking about from place to place, without any object before one, except to kill time."

"I dare say one does, after a few years," observed Mrs. Knowles, rather amused with

the young fellow's serious air. "And so you have been a long time seeing the world, have you?"

"Oh, yes; ever since I left Eton. I wanted to go to Oxford, but the governor would not let me; and for the last five years we have been yachting and travelling all over Europe, he and I, sometimes taking Gen for a cruise with us—Geneviève is my sister, you know,—but more often dawdling from harbour to harbour by ourselves, making no plans, and giving no address to anybody, so as to be quite free. It has been a pleasant life; but it couldn't go on for ever; and I think it was nearly time now that there should be an end of it."

"High time, I should say," agreed my grandmother. "The lady with the funny name don't care about yachting apparently."

"What lady?"

"I mean your father's second wife—Mrs. Gervis—if she calls herself so."

"Oh, Varinka. She is always called Princess Ouranoff. No; Varinka lives in Paris with Gen. Paris is in a sort of way our headquarters. I am often there; and the governor comes too—sometimes."

"I see," said Mrs. Knowles; meaning, no

doubt, to imply that the significance of the word "sometimes" was not lost upon her. "We must get your father to settle down at Southlands," she continued, after a short pause. "As for Princess Thingummy, if England is not good enough for her, I suppose she can't do better than remain in France."

Why is it that, in cases of apparent estrangement between husband and wife, the lady is invariably assumed to be in the wrong by her own sex? My grandmother, who, for all her shrewdness, has a feminine facility for jumping to conclusions, had evidently made up her mind already that the second Mrs. Gervis was no better than she should be, and would have been prepared, had the occasion presented itself, to accord to her such a reception as vice merits at the hands of eighty odd years of virtue.

Claud did not take up the cudgels for the absent Varinka, but responded with some eagerness to the first part of Mrs. Knowles' sentence.

"I wish you would!" he cried. "My great fear is that he will come here on a wet day, or that some trifle will make him take a dislike to the place. If anything of that kind does happen, he will put it into the hands of an agent at once, and be off before a week is out. Do, please, try and convince him that he ought

to be here for at least a part of the year, Mrs. Knowles."

"Of course he ought to be here," replied my grandmother, decisively. "It is not much of a property, to be sure; still, such as it is, it has been in his family for six or seven generations, and there would be just enough to do in managing it to give an idle man an occupation. If telling him his duty in plain language is likely to be of any use, you may count upon me. But I should imagine you would have more influence with your father than an old woman whom he hardly knows," she added, glancing at the young fellow's handsome face, and thinking, perhaps, of her own dead sons.

He shook his head. "I am a mere cypher," he said. "My father is—well, I don't quite know how to describe him; but you will see him yourself before long. As a general rule, people are rather frightened of him, and very few understand him. I do, I think; and we have always been very good friends, and he lets me do exactly as I like in almost everything. But then, he does as he likes too; and if our wishes happen to clash, I go to the wall —as is only natural. For instance, I wanted to go into some profession; but that did not suit him, so I had to give up the idea. Now

I want to live in England; and I am very much afraid that that will not suit him either."

"In matters of personal convenience, old folks ought to give way to young ones," said my grandmother.

And with that unhesitating assertion, which sounded a little strangely, coming from one whose children and grandchildren have been accustomed to hear sustaining a diametrically opposite theory, she took up her shawl and her gold-headed cane, and left us to finish the claret.

Theory and practice have so little to say to one another, alas! It would have been personally convenient to me, any time during the last quarter of a century, to be allowed to smoke an occasional cigar or two, at night, in some part of the house in South Crescent; but as I have never had the audacity even to hint at such a wish, I am in the habit, while staying under my grandmother's roof, of betaking myself to the club about ten o'clock; and thither I presently conducted my young friend.

In the smoking-room we discovered Freddy Croft, together with several other officers of the Royal Lynshire Yeomanry Cavalry, one of whom, with his legs gracefully disposed upon the table before him, was asleep and

snoring, while the others were apparently just awake enough to keep their cigars alight and to refresh themselves with occasional draughts from the tall tumblers which stood within reach of their arms. Freddy seated himself beside us, and explained that they were going to have "a turn at loo" soon, but were waiting until "Old Fireworks"—under which jocular pseudonym I understood him to designate my esteemed friend Admiral Bagshawe—should have gone home to roost.

"He's upstairs, having his last rubber of whist, and a deuce of a long time he takes over it too," said the impatient gambler. "Somebody told Lynchester we had better not show in the card-room till he had cleared out. It seems they have some rule here about not allowing games of chance, and this superannuated ass might make it unpleasant for us, they say, because he's in no end of a rage at not having been asked to our ball. You'd think an old fossil like that wouldn't care much about balls; but there's no pleasing some people. By-the-by, Gervis, you must honour our hop with your company; it'll be the grandest sport you ever saw. All the men ask their friends, you know—in fact it's supposed to be their ball really,—and half of them are sure to

be screwed before the evening is over. You're coming, of course, Knowles?"

"Well, no. I am in the same boat with Admiral Bagshawe and the other fossils," I replied; "I haven't been asked."

"Oh, that was because nobody knew you were here. You shall have a card to-morrow morning. The fact is, Lynchester didn't want to invite any Beachborough people at all. He said they'd only make unpleasant remarks about everybody, and ten to one they'd stay till the end, and spoil all the fun. However, Lady Lynchester and my mother and some of the other ladies went to him, and told him it would never do; and now, I believe, a good lot of the natives are coming. I don't know why old Bags was left out, I'm sure."

"I think," observed the sage and experienced person to whom this information was communicated, "that Lord Lynchester and all of you are making rather a mistake. You will earn far more enemies for yourselves by inviting half the town than by inviting nobody; and, after all, it is always better to avoid making enemies."

"Ah, yes; so some of the fellows were saying. But Lynchester is a queer-tempered chap, you know. He isn't best pleased at the

way people here have talked about him already; and if he was bothered any more about this ball, the odds are that he'd give them something to remember him by. Get into the cloak-room, and fill all their pockets with jellies and creams, or something of that kind, don't you know."

"Who is Lord Lynchester?" Gervis asked. "I think I should rather like to know him."

Freddy pointed to the sleeping form in the arm-chair, and explained that his lordship was the Colonel of the Lynshire Yeomanry, and the largest landed proprietor in the county.

"I don't know whether you'll exactly like him," he added, doubtfully; "it isn't every one who does. But of course you must know him, if you're going to settle down here. Come and take a hand at loo with us presently, and I'll introduce you to him, and to most of your other neighbours too."

"Very well," answered Claud, after a moment of hesitation. "Only I don't want to play for high stakes or to lose much money, Croft."

"All right, old man; you can stop whenever you like. I've been dropping rather more than I care about lately myself; so to-night I've only brought a fiver in my pocket, and as soon as that's gone I shall shut up."

Claud said he did not mind going as far as five pounds; and soon afterwards the veterans were heard stumping down the staircase; the sleeper awoke; the other young men rose and stretched themselves; and presently I was left in sole tenancy of the smoking-room. It was not suggested that I should join the loo party; nor, indeed, should I have thought for a moment of doing so, had I been asked, though it is possible that, like Mr. Pender, I might have felt flattered by having the option offered to me. That is the worst of associating with young men: they are for ever unconsciously reminding one that one is no longer young one's self.

"'Something we gain with age; but youth has departed,'" thinks I to myself, as I stroll along the sea front under the stars, and let myself in with my latch-key into the hall, where Hicks is waiting to open a bottle of soda-water for me and to ask a few questions about the young gentleman as they do tell him is a nephew of hold Colonel Gervis of Southlands. Ah, Hicks, my old friend, do you remember the days when that latch-key was put into requisition at hours of which you were careful to keep your respected mistress in ignorance? You are discreet, Hicks, and you do not remind the middle-aged gentleman who

steps in so demurely at eleven o'clock that he, too, once knew something of the seductive game of loo; you allude no longer to the terrible headaches he sometimes woke with of a morning, nor to those cunningly devised potions by means of which you enabled him to present himself at the breakfast table, and go through the appearance of eating. Another race hath been, Hicks, and other—h'm! well, never mind about the palms. Every dog has his day; and now that mine has passed by, I have the more leisure to contemplate the proceedings of my successors in those flowery, thorny paths which I have left behind me. From the serene height of middle age I look down upon them—upon their laughter and dances, their vain ambitions, their foolish loves, their absurd stumblings and flounderings. Can you for one moment suppose that I would step down again and join them, if I could? Do you imagine that anything would induce me to sit up till the small hours, gambling with Lord Lynchester and his friends, like those two silly youngsters? No, no, Hicks, you are too well acquainted with me to misjudge me so greatly. I know that in your heart you have a profound respect for me, as for a man of the world, who takes proper care of his health and

his comfort, who has contrived to steer clear of the shoals of matrimony, and who has ever kept a steady eye upon the main chance. Hand me my flat candlestick, Hicks, and let me go upstairs and get to bed before midnight, as all respectable persons should. I envy no man, and would not exchange the accumulated wisdom of five and forty years against all the callow dreams of early life. At the same time, I think those revellers might have gone through the form of asking me to join in their game.

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CHAPTER III.

THE OWNER OF SOUTHLANDS.

THERE was a great disturbance, I remember, in the Beachborough Club when a modest, but resolute phalanx of members, headed by Mr. Warde, the clergyman of the parish, declared their intention of enforcing the rule prohibiting conversations to be carried on in the reading-room. Putting a strictly literal interpretation upon the statutes of the establishment, it was not to be disputed that the malcontents had right on their side; but, on the other hand, there was a general feeling that such old and influential residents as Admiral Bagshawe, General Blair, and a few others, were privileged persons, and that an attack directed against one of their most cherished habits assumed at once something of a personal character. In this light, indeed, it was regarded by the Admiral himself, who summoned an extraor-

dinary general meeting of the club forthwith, and delivered himself thereat of a speech so eloquent, and so full of sarcastic allusions to gentlemen who were not content with having all the talking to themselves on Sundays, but must needs try to shut their neighbours' mouths for the rest of the week into the bargain, that poor Mr. Warde, the meekest and most inoffensive of men, would probably have apologised and withdrawn his motion, had he not been unexpectedly seconded by Mr. Pender. Mr. Pender happened at that time to be in the thick of one of his periodical feuds with his old friend the Admiral, and when he rose slowly to his feet, significant smiles and nudgings of the elbow were exchanged among the ranks of the cowed opposition. He said he would name no names, and it would be his endeavour to avoid giving offence even to certain rather over-susceptible individuals ; but he did think the line ought to be drawn at *shouting*. Doubtless there were infirmities which in the course of time and nature might fall upon any one of us ; but he would suggest that ear-trumpets were to be purchased at a comparatively trifling outlay. For his own part, he pleaded guilty to the infirmity of weak nerves. For years he had silently borne the

excruciating creaking of a certain gallant gentleman's boots. That was not conversation, and he was not entitled to complain of it. For years he had put up with the same gallant gentleman's exasperating habit of blowing his nose at frequent intervals in such a manner as to shake the house to its foundations. The gallant gentleman might play "God save the Queen" on his nose, if he pleased—indeed, he (Mr. Pender) had often fancied that he was trying to do so,—still that would not be conversation. But when, added to all this, the gallant gentleman took to bawling and cursing——

Here the Admiral, in a stentorian voice, said he had not come there to listen to pot-house personalities. The orator retaliated; other members joined in the fray; hot words passed; finally, the committee resigned *en masse;* and for a time it really looked as if all order and authority had come to an end, and anarchy was staring us in the face.

At length, however, a peace-maker, whom modesty forbids the present chronicler to specify, stepped in, and proposed a compromise. On the opposite side of the passage to the reading-room, there was a room which had hitherto been used for no especial purpose,

which was seldom entered, and which in truth was but half-furnished. The suggestion that, with the aid of the surplus funds in the hands of the treasurer, this apartment might be transformed into a cheerful meeting-place for those who liked to smoke a pipe over their leading articles, and to exchange a few remarks between the whiffs of it, was fortunate enough to meet with universal acceptance. Harmony was restored; the committee withdrew their resignation; we all shook hands upon it; and from that day forth the morning-room of the club became the favourite haunt of the Beachborough magnates.

In the forenoons, when officers had arduous military duties to attend to, and other young men were engaged in such out-door pursuits as their several tastes and the season of the year inclined them to, the veterans had it all their own way there. Between eleven o'clock and mid-day they would drop in, one by one, and, after fidgeting about a little, and glancing at the papers which lay upon the table (I fancy they had read their *Times* at home, and did not come to the club to hear news of the outer world), would gravitate towards the bow-window, where they would stand in a group, telling the old tales, chuckling over the old jokes, and retailing

the old local chit-chat, season after season, and year after year. Outside, perhaps, the sun was shining down upon the far-stretching expanse of blue sea, the children were playing upon the beach, the gulls were poising themselves and swooping this way and that, like flashes of light against the sky; or perhaps a roaring sou'-wester was driving great green breakers against the revetment, and sending showers of spray high above the very roofs of the houses; but the old fellows heeded these sights no more. If their dimmed eyes wandered at all from one another's faces, it was only to scan some passer-by on the pavement; their dulled hearing was strained to catch no sweeter sound than some whispered scandal; their whole lives were contracted into an ever-narrowing passage, at the end of which Death stood quietly waiting, and snatched one of the little coterie every now and again. From such an old age as this *Domine libera nos!* I declare that, of all the sad sights in this sad world, there are few to me more pathetic than that of a knot of old fogeys in a club window. Mayhap they have done good service in their day. They have fought their country's battles by sea and land; they have had their share of honour and fame; at home, in the faded leather case, they keep

medals and crosses earned in campaigns which the world has forgotten—nay,. which they themselves have half forgotten too; and now they have got to kill Time as best they may, till Time mercifully takes his turn of the game and kills them. They have not many resources, poor old souls! They don't care much for reading; they are apt to be terribly prosy after dinner; they lose their old tempers somewhat easily over their whist; young men and boys make fun of them;—perhaps it is not very surprising that they should take so profound an interest in trifles, and discourse so lengthily upon matters which are no business of theirs. Hear a sample of their conversation, as they stand on the accustomed strip of carpet, which has been worn threadbare by the Admiral's creaking shoes, while the June sunshine streams through the open windows, and the waves rise and fall upon the shingle with a sleepy undercurrent of sound. It is deaf General Blair who is speaking.

"This man Gervis is a devil of a fellow," says he, in those slow, drawling accents which I know so well. "I don't know what people down here mean to do about calling on him, but I understand that they won't let him into a single respectable house in Paris—won't have

him at any price. Married two heiresses; poisoned one, got a separation from t'other, and holds on to the money. Clever rascal, too, I believe. They were devilish sorry to lose him in the diplomatic service. Stuck to him as long as they could, but what with one thing and another, it really wouldn't do, you know, and they had to give him a hint to go. I heard the whole story, the other day, at the Senior from Allonby—you know Colonel Allonby, Admiral."

"Allonby is as blatant an ass as ever brayed," growls the Admiral, who looks with suspicion upon all hearsay information, save such as is imparted by himself.

"Just so—Allonby, who commanded the third battalion of the Rifle Brigade," pursues the deaf narrator serenely. "Allonby is a man who goes a good deal into society and knows everybody, and I thought it would be as well just to ask him what he had heard of this man before I decided on leaving a card at Southlands."

"From what I have been told," observes Major Davis (half-pay, late Bengal Staff-corps), "I doubt whether he would have returned your visit, if you had. As far as I can make out, the man's as mad as a March hare. Barton, the town-clerk, was over in Paris last week,

and he found out his address, and took the trouble to call upon him half a dozen times, hoping to have a friendly talk with him about that right-of-way question that there was so much bother with in the old man's time ; but he never got farther than the door, nor received a card in return. At last, after he had written, begging for an appointment, he saw the son—the young fellow who is here now—who told him it wasn't the least use his coming again, for he was quite certain his father wouldn't talk business with him or anybody else. And then, when Barton asked whether Mr. Gervis intended living at Southlands, he muttered something about getting the doctor's leave first. Looks queer, doesn't it ? There is madness in the family, you know."

"Not at all. Oh dear no ! Nothing of the kind. Pooh, pooh !" This series of staccato rejoinders proceeds from the Admiral.

"Well, I only state what I believe to be the case," says Major Davis, slightly offended. "I consider the Gervises to be a decidedly crazy family. In my opinion, the late man was a madman."

"In my opinion," retorts the irrepressible Admiral, "he was as sane as you are—saner. The fact of the matter is that nobody knows

anything of his brother, except that there must be something shady about him. Else, why should he never come to England?"

Mr. Pender, who has listened to the foregoing conversation with a faint, superior smile, here observes that he has heard something upon tolerably good authority about the new owner of Southlands, but does not care to talk about it.

"No, Major Davis, if you will excuse me, I should prefer to hold my tongue. You will soon find it out for yourselves, and I never break through my rule of keeping silence when the character of my neighbours is under discussion. Besides, I should only be contradicted, if I did speak."

"I don't know who's going to contradict you here. What d'ye mean?" asks the Admiral, fiercely.

"Oh, nothing," answers Mr. Pender, still smiling pleasantly. "Did you read Gladstone's speech at Greenwich yesterday, Admiral?"

"No, I didn't. I never read Gladstone's speeches, and never will," replies the Admiral, snappishly. "If there is a thing I can't stand, it's a man who won't say what he means," he adds presently, alluding, no doubt, to some one not so far away as the liberal statesman.

General Blair is quite of the Admiral's way of thinking, and so is Major Davis.

"Upon my soul, I don't see the necessity for so much caution, Mr. Pender," remarks the latter. "It's rather a poor compliment to us, I must say. After all, we aren't a pack of old women, to go babbling about all we hear, are we?"

"Out with it, Pender—out with it! You know you're dying to tell," chimes in the General, with a senile chuckle.

Thus urged, Mr. Pender consents to communicate his intelligence. Glancing first over his right shoulder, then over his left, he draws a step closer to the eager warrior, whose hand is raised expectantly to his ear. "The truth is——" he begins, in a low, impressive voice. And then he lifts his closed hand to his lips, elevates his little finger, and throws back his head.

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"God bless my soul, you don't say so! Well, I half suspected as much myself."

"Ah, the old story! His father was just the same, you know."

Mr. Pender has bottled up his dose of calumny as he does his trumps at whist, and now reaps the reward of self-restraint in the shape of a general acceptance of his theory. At first some feeling of disappointment was

apparent that matters were no worse; but when Major Davis had good-naturedly pointed out that the fact of a man's being a drunkard by no means excludes the possibility of his having killed one wife, ill-treated another, and appropriated the fortunes of both, but is rather, so to speak, presumptive evidence in favour of his having done so, the cronies cheered up again, and presently trotted off to their respective homes to luncheon, having agreed that they would certainly call at Southlands so soon as the arrival of its iniquitous tenant should be announced.

"As there will be no lady in the house," remarked Mr. Pender, in conclusion, "I shall, of course, not take Mrs. Pender with me; and I should not feel myself justified in holding aloof from a neighbour because he unfortunately gives way to intemperance."

"Dash it all! what do I care whether a man drinks or not? I shall go because I want to have a look at the beggar," says the Admiral, more honestly.

Shall I confess that there was another person present who felt a similar curiosity? We all have our weaknesses; and I am given to understand that one of mine is an exaggerated interest in the ways and manners of persons with whom

I am not called upon by any duty to associate. Being an unoccupied man, and in need of a hobby of some kind, I have found one for myself in the observation of my fellow-mortals; and a really original human being is as delightful a find to me as an original picture by Botticelli would be to another kind of dilettante. Not on account of his supposed misdeeds (for sinners, as we know, can scarcely be considered rarities in the race to which we have the honour to belong) was I so anxious to make Mr. Gervis's acquaintance, but because certain casual remarks, dropped, in my presence, by his son, had led me to imagine him a man such as one does not meet with every day.

Circumstances had thrown me a good deal into the society of Claud during the first days of his sojourn in his new home. The young fellow wanted somebody to consult with and to assist him in making preparations for his father's arrival; and as he could not see much of Freddy Croft, who, between drill and Miss Lambert, had little time to spare, I suppose he made a friend of me in default of a better.

I believe I was of some little use to him in small matters where he had no personal experience to guide him—such as, for instance, in conciliating the old servants of the late

Colonel Gervis, and in inducing them to co-operate in the re-arrangement of furniture, and so forth: at all events, he was pleased to say that he considered himself greatly indebted to me. The time was too short to allow of our carrying out all Claud's designs, but between us we managed to furbish up the old house and give it an inhabited look, and on that morning when I played the eavesdropper at the club, I was on my way to luncheon at Southlands, where some few details still required notice, and where I was to have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Lambert and her daughter—those ladies having signified through Freddy Croft that they were still languishing to behold the park and garden which had so long been closed against all intruders.

I dare say love of the picturesque did not enter for much into Mrs. Lambert's desire to visit Southlands; but, as a fact, the pleasure-grounds of that moderate-sized domain far surpass in beauty any of those belonging to the more pretentious mansions of the county. The late owner of the place had, it seems, a passion for landscape gardening; and I don't know where he could have found a property better adapted by nature for the gratification of his tastes. Sometimes, in the old man's time, a

party of Cockney excursionists (for Beachborough is but a hundred miles or so from London, and well within reach of 'Arry and his sweet friends) would apply at the lodge for permission to take a stroll through the gardens, receiving in answer a prompt assurance that their request could not be entertained for a moment. Against them, as against their betters, the iron gates remained resolutely shut; but when, following the instincts of their race, they went out sailing in the bay towards evening, they could, if it so pleased them, enjoy a distant view of what has always seemed to me one of the most pleasantly situated country houses in England.

The long and somewhat monotonous line of chalk cliffs, topped by bare downs, which forms nine-tenths of the coast scenery of Lynshire, takes at Beachborough a sudden inward sweep, and immediately to the westward of the town a deep, well-wooded valley, narrowing into a mere ravine towards its head, cuts for some two miles into the country. The eye, weary and dazzled with gazing at white cliffs, white houses, and a sea and sky which, on the hottest days, are often also of a whitish hue, turns gratefully towards those dark, cool woods, and, following them upwards, rests presently upon a low, irre-

gular house, built of grey stone, and standing with its back against the hill-side. Even from that distance the terraces, the shrubberies, and the bright patches of flower-beds that lie about it can be distinguished, and jaded holiday-makers, as they look, may indulge their imagination in picturing to themselves what a pleasant dream life must be to the idle and rich folks who dwell amid such enchanted bowers. There is a park, too, one notices, sloping downwards in the direction of the town in a succession of grassy undulations; but it has not much to boast of in the way of timber, and such trees as there are are stunted and blown landwards by the winter gales which sweep up the valley and have it all their own way on its eastern and more exposed flank. The house, facing a point or two west of south, is sheltered from these by a shoulder of the hill and by a belt of fir-trees; and behind it are more trees, growing gradually thinner and smaller, till the valley loses itself among corn-fields, which, in their turn, give place to the gorse and heather of the moors.

Viewed from the sea, whence alone it can be seen as a whole, the landscape hereabouts is a brilliant mass of varied colours; for even when the yellow blossoms have fallen from the gorse,

there are mustard-fields here and there, besides clover and sainfoin and the purple bloom of the heather that crowns all. A glittering thread shows itself in places between the trees. It is the stream, which, as one would expect from the lie of the land, finds its way along the bottom of the ravine towards the shore—a tiny streamlet, yet deep enough to harbour trout in its innumerable pools. If you were near enough to it, you would perceive that a pathway follows its course, crossing and re-crossing it by means of frequent rustic bridges, and leading past the house to the open country beyond.

Now this foot-path, which makes a pleasant short cut from Beachborough to Southlands, is likewise the shortest way, by a good two miles, to Northbourne, West Somerley, and several other inland villages which can only otherwise be reached from the town by walking along the Lynchester high-road and turning abruptly to the left at the point where the Southlands park palings cease. Whether the public ever enjoyed a right of way through those shady woodlands I will not take upon me to determine: it is certain that no one was ever allowed to exercise it by old Colonel Gervis; and as the lawsuit with which he was so frequently threatened was never actually brought against him, I am

inclined to think that, as regarded this particular count in his quarrel with the world, he must have had right on his side. Be that as it may, the shady short cut had been a great convenience to me in my daily visits to Southlands; and on the morning already alluded to I turned my steps in the accustomed direction, thinking to myself, with some inward satisfaction, as I went, that Mrs. Lambert and her daughter could hardly be aware of its existence, and were probably at that very moment toiling wearily up the dusty hill in a fly.

This fond illusion was abruptly dispelled before I had advanced a hundred yards into the wood. Suddenly, above the liquid notes of the thrushes overhead, the continuous sleepy murmur of the insects in mid-air and the babbling of the stream at my feet, arose the jarring accents of a too familiar human voice, and simultaneously there appeared, from a bench behind a tree, an ample human form, expensively clad.

"Oh, you bad man!" cries Mrs. Lambert, shaking her parasol at me with charming playfulness; "so you knew of this delightful walk all along, and never told us about it! I believe the truth was you did not want our company."

Have I mentioned that Mrs. Lambert, on

becoming aware of my entire respectability, had assumed a demeanour of the most flattering friendliness towards me—so much so, indeed, that I had latterly wondered more than once, with some anxiety, whether Mr. Lambert had as yet gone to his long home?

"Katie and Fred—and Sir Frederick have gone on," she resumed. "I sat down to rest for a few minutes and to enjoy this lovely prospect. Don't you love sitting in the woods in summer, Mr. Knowles?"

"Yes; but by the time you get to the house, you'll find the gnats have been feeding upon your wrists and ankles," I replied. "At least, I sincerely trust they have," I added *in petto*. After which we resumed our upward way, side by side, chatting amicably. I am sorry to say that I have not my grandmother's gift of snubbing disagreeable people, and can never, for the life of me, help being civil to a bore. It is a humiliating thought that, if there were no easy-going listeners like myself, the race of bores would probably ere long become extinct.

At the point where the path touches the boundary of the garden, we came upon Freddy Croft assisting Miss Lambert to fasten one of the buttons of her glove; and I perceived, from the manner in which the young lady rolled

her eyes and then cast them down, that she was trying hard to blush. "Is it possible," I thought, "that Freddy can be such an ass as to—— But no, it is *not* possible. In one respect, at least, the youths of the present day are more wide awake than their elders used to be; and surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird! Nevertheless it is a risky game to flutter too close to the meshes. I wonder, now, whether a word in season from an old friend would be taken amiss."

While I was thus communing with my heart, we were advancing slowly across a sunny lawn all ablaze with beds of scarlet geraniums and calceolarias and verbenas, and presently emerging from behind a clump of rhododendrons, found ourselves face to face with Claud Gervis, upon whose arm an elderly stranger was leaning.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lambert? How do you do, Croft?" said the young man, shaking hands with his guests. "Let me introduce my father, who arrived unexpectedly this morning."

The stranger took off his hat, holding it in his hand, without that hurry to replace it which an Englishman usually displays, while he bowed to each of us in turn. He was a man of something less than middle height, who stooped

a good deal and carried himself with the fatigued air of an invalid. His hands and feet were the tiniest I had ever seen upon a male creature. His waxed moustache was black, as was also his hair; but it seemed probable that both owed something to the appliances of art. After scrutinizing his features in search of any expression of character which might be revealed from beneath those drooped eyelids or about the lines surrounding the mouth, I gave up the attempt, on discovering that there was absolutely no expression there at all. His face was a colourless waxen mask, which, if it had any secrets to tell, apparently did not impart them to casual seekers. Upon the whole, my impression of him resolved itself into three conclusions: firstly, that he was a gentleman; secondly, that in appearance and breeding he was a Frenchman; and thirdly, that he was either much older than he looked or looked much older than he was.

When he began to speak, it was in a rather peculiar, but not unpleasant voice—low and languid, but as clear as a bell. "I think myself very fortunate to have arrived in time to welcome these ladies. I should not myself have ventured to have invited them into our rough bachelor quarters; but Claud has always had

the advantage of me in audacity. I am sure Miss Lambert understands that a father is not to blame for attractions which may well make his son a trifle indiscreet, and I hope Mrs. Lambert will remember that neither of us is responsible for the cook."

When Mr. Gervis had concluded this somewhat equivocal greeting, he almost closed his eyes, surveying us, with his head laid a little on one side, after the fashion of an elderly jackdaw; and a pause supervened, during which I think we were all wishing ourselves away.

Perhaps Mrs. Lambert had a dim impression that she was being indirectly accused of gluttony, for she broke the silence by observing that she scarcely ever touched anything in the middle of the day. "I wish one could live without eating at all. Don't you, Mr. Gervis?"

Mr. Gervis said, Certainly not. He should be very fond of eating, only he could never get nice things to eat, somehow. And so the conversation became general; and in due course we reached the house, where I observed that Mrs. Lambert did full justice to the delicacies set before her.

The unexpected addition to our party was felt as something of a restraint by all of us, except Freddy Croft, who never was known to

exhibit signs of shyness in his life, and whose tongue was employed no less actively than his knife and fork.

"What a jolly old house this is! Just the sort of place I should like to live in. Big enough to hold as many people as one would ever care to have staying with one, you know, and yet not so big as to make one think about hanging one's self, if one was left alone for a few days. Stands well, too: I do like a house with a view. The only thing is, you do want a bit of level ground somewhere, don't you? I suppose there isn't a single place in the park where you could possibly pitch a wicket. But that don't matter so much for you, Gervis; you never used to dry-bob at Eton, did you?"

"Very seldom," answered Claud, a little regretfully. "I wish I had now. There are so few rivers in England; and of course one can get cricket almost everywhere. I can play after a fashion: not well enough to be allowed to figure in any of your county matches, though, I'm afraid."

The lad had already confided to me his ambition to excel in all the sports which find favour in the eyes of English gentlemen, and that his great dread was that his neighbours might set him down as a muff.

"My dear fellow," answered Freddy, reassuringly, "you don't know what a lot of duffers we are down here. *You'll* do fast enough. As for the Lynshire eleven, it was simply a by-word till I took it up, three years ago; and even now, taking our performance as a whole, I should say we turn out about the worst team in England. I make the fellows practise, though—that's one thing. You see, *I* have plenty of level ground—only too much of it! By-the-by, Miss Lambert, you have never seen my ancestral abode, have you? I flatter myself that, in point of sheer, uncompromising hideousness, it hasn't a rival in Europe. You really ought to come over and have a look at it some day, you know."

"We have not been asked yet," observed Mrs. Lambert, smiling archly, and displaying as fine a set of teeth as can be bought for money.

A queer look came into Freddy's face for a moment. Indeed, it was not very likely that Mrs. Lambert would be invited to enter Croft Manor so long as his mother presided over that establishment.

"Oh, well, there's nobody there now, don't you know," he replied, shirking the question adroitly. "Later on, my people will be coming

down for the summer, and then we shall make you stand up and be bowled at, Gervis. You are going to stop here for good now, of course."

"Well, I hope so. I don't quite know yet."

"Oh, you must. The continent's all very well for a time; but England's the country to live in, isn't it, Mrs. Lambert?"

"Oh, the *only* country," acquiesced that lady. "The English people who regularly reside abroad are such a very odd lot."

Her daughter made a grimace. Possibly she may have been shrewd enough to have discovered that, if there was one thing obnoxious to her easy-going admirer, it was humbug. "We lived abroad ourselves for ever so many years, as I was telling you the other day," she remarked; "and I must say I enjoyed it immensely."

"Ah, yes; but then you're a lady, which makes all the difference," said Freddy. "What is a man to do with himself all day abroad? I mean an ignorant beggar like myself, who don't pretend to care much about churches and pictures and all that."

"Some people do like churches and pictures," Claud observed.

"You do, I dare say; but most fellows don't; they only make believe. No; what I think is,

foreign countries are very useful to run over to once a year—say in April. I can do very well with a week of Paris and a fortnight of Nice and Monaco about that time; but I don't want any more. Then there's one's wedding-trip. I suppose I shall have to spend a month at the Italian lakes, or some other beastly hole, then."

"I am sure that, when that time comes, you will be allowed to please yourself, Sir Frederick," said Mrs. Lambert, with much amiability.

"Nobody is ever allowed to please himself again after he is married," replied the young man, sententiously. Whereat Claud laughed, and Miss Lambert said—

"Of course not. Why should men think they have a right to be selfish all their lives?"

"Katie, my dear!" exclaimed the elder and more foolish lady, "you must not say such things. It is a wife's bounden duty to consult her husband's wishes before her own."

"Ah, Miss Lambert," sighed Freddy, "if you will only bear that in mind, what a happy life yours may be!"

"She will, Sir Frederick; depend upon it, she will," cried the fond mother. "I know her better than to believe all the nonsense she talks. She may say what she pleases; but if ever

there was an unselfish girl," etc., etc. So the old farce went on—the old farce that has been played so many times, and, strange to say, with such frequent success.

Mr. Gervis, all this time, had remained perfectly silent and impassive. Whether he was listening or not it was impossible to say. Once I saw him cock his head on one side, and look at Mrs. Lambert consideringly; after which he shifted it over to the other, and took a brief survey of Freddy Croft; but this, so far as I could observe, was the sole symptom of life that he manifested for the best part of an hour, during which time he leant back in his chair, neither eating nor drinking, nor moving a feature—the picture of blank weariness.

He did not offer to accompany us when we passed through the open French windows of the dining-room, and set out to inspect the gardens and shrubberies at our leisure. Probably he was aware that we should be more at our ease without him, and doubtless he, on his side, was likely to be a shade less bored in his own company than in ours. We duly visited the conservatories, Claud leading the way and doing his duty as showman very creditably; we said what was proper to the head-gardener, who directed our attention to

his rare exotics; we wandered up the winding gravel paths and among the clumps of rhododendrons and azaleas which clothe the slopes behind the house; and then one of the party, whose temperament inclines him towards indolence on summer afternoons, lagged behind, till, taking advantage of a friendly thicket, he slipped aside unnoticed, and laid him down upon a grassy bank to rest.

It was a pleasant place that I had chosen, under the shade of a tall magnolia. Far beneath me stretched the sea, upon whose glassy surface a few fishing-boats lay becalmed; a hanging haze of smoke to the left showed the position of the town, and from it woodlands trended gently upwards to meet the lawns and terraces and parterres upon which the man who was dead had spent so much time and money. As I lay there, enjoying my cigar, I could fancy I saw him pottering about hither and thither among the workmen, criticising this, condemning that, quarrelling with his gardener, perhaps asking himself inwardly, what, when all was said and done, was the good of it all—a grim, lonely old figure. "Where is he now?" I wonder, clasping my hands behind my head, and staring up at the cloudless sky. "Would he be vexed if he could see the strangers

making free with the sacred enclosures which were his once and will never be his again throughout eternity? We go hence, and are forgotten; but do we forget? Do all earthly treasures and interests and ambitions become as the merest dross in our eyes the moment that we escape from the prison of this body?" Every one will understand the profound train of thought into which such speculations as these were likely to lead, and not a few will perceive the probable result thereof, when supplemented by warm weather and tobacco.

When I opened my eyes again the shadows were long and black upon the grass, and Claud Gervis, with his hands in his pockets, was standing before me and laughing.

"Dear me!" said I, sitting up and rubbing my eyes, "I believe I have been asleep."

"I believe you have," answered my young friend. "Do you know that it is getting on for six o'clock?"

You don't say so! What have you done with the ladies?"

"You will be sorry to hear that they have been obliged to go away without bidding you good-bye. Croft drove them down the hill in his mail-phaeton a quarter of an hour ago. I was to apologize to you and to my father,

whom also we failed to discover. We looked for him in every room, except the one where I knew he was sure to be—which may account for it. Are you inclined to walk down to the town? If you are, I will go with you; only I must just see the governor first, and tell him he can come out without danger of encountering any more strange ladies."

We found Mr. Gervis in the library, reading a book, which he laid aside upon our entrance, and which I afterwards had the curiosity to glance at, and found to be a well-worn copy of Montaigne.

"The coast is clear, governor," said Claud. "Mrs. Lambert sends you all sorts of polite messages, and is inconsolable at not having shaken hands with you before she left."

"I don't know," observed Mr. Gervis, addressing me in his tired, deliberate voice, "whether the term 'governor' is considered quite the proper thing in this country. In my time we used to say 'sir,' which is perhaps slightly ridiculous. 'Papa' is equally objectionable in another way, and 'father' has always struck me as having a certain plebeian ring. When one man is constantly speaking to another, he has to call him something; and we hit upon 'governor' as, upon the whole,

meeting the requirements of the case. The French people thought it sounded very fitting and respectful; but I am not sure whether it will quite do here. I have lived so long out of England, that I am obliged to ask how I ought to behave."

I said I thought that, in these days, parents and children need not consult any one's convenience but their own as regarded their mutual relations; and he assured me that I relieved him exceedingly.

"So they are gone—your friends?" he remarked to his son. "Is Mrs. Lambert a native of Beachborough?"

"No; only a visitor, I believe."

"She is a most impossible person. Does young Croft intend to marry the daughter?"

"I should hope not," answered Claud, laughing; "but you had better ask Mr. Knowles. He knows more about it than I do."

Mr. Gervis's interest in the matter was, however, not very keen, it appeared; for he forbore to question me, and sat silent for a time, absently drumming upon the table with his little white fingers. At length he resumed:

"I feel that I ought to beg everybody's pardon for appearing on the scene in that abrupt way, and spoiling the luncheon-party:

nothing is more inconsiderate than taking people by surprise. But really the fault was my valet's, not mine. I leave all details of that kind to him, Mr. Knowles, just as I leave the management of my household to Claud; and I assure you that, between them, they lead me a deuce of a life. Apropos, Claud, have you any news from Paris?"

"I had a letter this morning," answered the young man, looking at his father a little apprehensively, I thought. "Varinka and Gen talk of being here the day after to-morrow. You won't go away, will you?"

"My dear fellow, what a question! You forget that we are in England, and that we belong to the smaller class of landed gentry. Having accepted the situation, we can but endeavour to show ourselves equal to it; and so long as the Princess chooses to honour me with her company, I shall remain at my post. I imagine, however, that a fortnight of Southlands will be the outside that she will be able to accomplish."

"That remains to be seen," answered Claud, cheerfully. "At all events, we will hope for the best."

"Well—yes; we will hope for that," said Mr. Gervis. And I gathered from his tone

that his notion of what was best might perhaps not be identical with his son's.

Soon afterwards Claud and I started for Beachborough; and, as we walked down through the wood, my companion confided to me that his father and step-mother were not upon the best of terms, and that he was very anxious to effect a reconciliation between them. "There is no actual quarrel," he explained; "only a sort of misunderstanding. They are both good people, but they are both peculiar; and they do not understand one another—that is all."

"Oh, that is all, is it?" said I, liking the lad none the less for his innocent self-confidence. Quarrels are made up every day; but there is only one cure that ever I heard of for a chronic misunderstanding; and that is death. I did not, however, give utterance to this discouraging sentiment; and the would-be peace-maker proceeded to treat of his designs in a very sanguine strain until we reached the harbour, where he went on board the *Siren*, and we parted.

CHAPTER IV.

PROVINCIALITIES.

"WELL, and if he *has* quarrelled with his wife—what then?" said my grandmother, peering at me over her spectacles. "Many a wise man has done that before now, and many a fool has suffered for not doing it. Ahab, for instance. If he had had the strength of mind to quarrel with Jezebel, he might have ruled his people as well as most kings, and died in his bed like a decent man. Samson, again. A pretty pass he brought himself to by making it up with Delilah after she had betrayed him once!"

"Oh, certainly," I agreed, "and if you come to that, we are all in our present lamentable predicament by reason of the uxoriousness of Adam. I am not for one moment standing up for wives as a class—indeed, if I possessed one, it is more than probable that I should quarrel with her myself,—only I thought I had better

warn you that Mr. Gervis and his princess don't exactly hit it off, because you are generally so very severe upon unfortunates who fail in their matrimonial duties."

In point of fact, Mrs. Knowles has made herself somewhat notorious in her native county by the sternness of her demeanour towards certain semi-estranged couples; and although I had not thought fit to dispute her assertion that our new neighbour was the most original and amusing man she had met for years, it did seem to me that, in view of future possible contingencies, it might be well to remind her that his domestic relations left something to be desired.

"There is no rule without an exception," she answered calmly. "And I never listen to gossip, as you know."

"Gossip!—why, I had it from the man's own son. To think that a fine, clear sense of justice should allow itself to be so obscured by the mere empty compliment of a morning call!"

"Empty fiddlestick! Surely there is nothing very surprising in one of my oldest friends coming to see me, and making himself agreeable. From what you say, I imagine that he didn't exert himself to talk to you the other day, and therefore you don't like him. Don't

you be so fond of judging your neighbours, Tom; but turn your attention nearer home, and it will be the better for you some day. Now, as you have paid me the unusual 'empty compliment' of being in at this hour of the evening, you may ring the bell for prayers."

And so, presently, the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians is read out in a clear, ringing voice, and somewhat pointed emphasis gives me to understand that I am no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

But although Mr. Gervis was thus early taken into favour by one influential inhabitant of Beachborough, the rest of his neighbours, whether in the town or the surrounding country, eyed him askance, and seemed in no great hurry to cultivate his acquaintance. A vague yet general impression that the man was under a cloud caused these wary provincials to hold aloof at the outset, no one choosing to be the first to hold out the right hand of fellowship to one of whose antecedents so little definite was known. They encircled him, as it were, each with a visiting-card in one hand and a brickbat in the other, waiting for further information before deciding which of these forms of welcome should be launched at the intruder.

This truly British attitude exhibited itself with amusing distinctness on the evening of the much-talked-of yeomanry ball, at which, to the great surprise of the assembled company, Mr. Gervis saw fit to appear. When Claud Gervis entered, followed by his father, I happened to be standing beside the Admiral, who must, I suppose, have received an invitation at the last moment; and as that gallant officer has an inveterate habit of thinking aloud, I was enabled to follow the course of his reflections, which may be taken as fairly representing those of his friends.

"Cool, I must say—devilish cool! Wonder who asked him here? Oh, young Croft, eh? —there he is, shaking hands with him. Hah! don't think much of that; young Croft would know anybody. Introducing him to his mother, though, I see. Well, of course, if Lady Croft takes him up—— Hullo! that was rather a stiff bow. Fellow's a regular adventurer, I suspect, —looks like it, anyhow. God bless my soul! there's Lord Lynchester going up to speak to him. Wonder what they're laughing at—dare say he's an amusing sort of scoundrel, you know, eh? Upon my word, I've a great mind to—— No, dash it all! no; it wouldn't do. All very well for those grandees—it don't matter to

them; but a family man, living in the place, eh? No, no—wait a bit; wait a bit."

While the Admiral took counsel with himself in this strain, Mr. Gervis, whose interlocutor had now left him, strolled slowly back towards the door, and, espying there an unoccupied arm-chair, dropped into it, and, crossing his legs comfortably, gave himself up to a leisurely study of the natives, most of whom, as he was perhaps aware, were returning the compliment with interest.

Sitting there, conspicuously apart, every inch of his person, from his pale, changeless face to his black silk stockings and his little shiny shoes, could be seen from the farthest part of the long room; and if all eyes had not already been turned in his direction, they would have become so a few minutes later, when the august forms of Lord and Lady Courtney were seen looming in the doorway, close to his elbow.

Lord Courtney, the lord-lieutenant of Lynshire, is a nobleman in whom we all feel a legitimate pride. He is not over and above civil to us, it is true, and behind his back we may sometimes affect to laugh at his high and mighty ways, calling him Old Pomposity, and other irreverent names; but for all that,

and despite the fact that his features are of the homeliest, and that (as my grandmother often says) he has "about as much brains in his head as would lie upon a shilling," we can't but acknowledge the reflected lustre shed upon us by his magnificent presence. I have stared at most of the emperors and kings of the world; but never a one amongst them have I beheld who could compare with our lord-lieutenant in sublimity of carriage, or who appeared to have a tithe of his conscious grandeur. When Lord Courtney takes his walks abroad, he holds his head so high that the brim of his hat almost rests upon his nose, which indeed is slightly upturned, as if to support it; a smile, half benign, half tolerant, usually plays about the corners of his mouth; he moves with a slow, dignified step, which is almost, but not quite, a strut. One has heard many people accused of offering two fingers of their left hand to their acquaintances; but Lord Courtney is the only man I know who habitually practises this form of greeting. And as it is an established axiom that we must set a high value upon ourselves if we would be thought highly of by the world, it is perhaps not surprising that his lordship should occupy the exalted position that he does in English society, and that a nod from him

should be more prized in Beachborough than half an hour of Lord Lynchester's racy talk.

When, therefore, this majestic creature, instead of advancing serenely into the ball-room, looking straight before him, as is his wont, halted before the little old man in the arm-chair, and, holding out his entire right hand, said, in a cordial voice, "How are you, Gervis? how are you? Glad to see you. Didn't know you were in these parts"—when, I say, so unexpected a voucher of respectability as this was conferred upon the mysterious stranger, what could Beachborough do but throw itself metaphorically at his feet?

As weird, unreal shapes, born of darkness, vanish at the rising of the sun, even so the shades of suspicion and calumny which had hung about our poor friend were dispersed by the first beams of Lord Courtney's noble countenance; and in less time than it has taken to describe the entrance of that luminary, Mr. Gervis's character had been established upon a basis above the reach of vulgar detraction. Drink?—was ever so absurd a charge brought against an obviously abstemious invalid! Insanity?—why, the man's wit and talents had earned him a reputation in every European capital! Cruelty, indeed!—what next? But

there!—everybody knows that there is no scandal too foolish to obtain credence in this ill-natured world; and is it not morally certain that if the angel Gabriel himself were to visit us in disguise, such fellows as Blair and Pender would immediately pretend to know of something to his disadvantage? The Admiral, for his part, was glad to say that he had never believed a single syllable of the rubbish that had been whispered to him; and he lost no time in shaking hands with the new-comer in his bluff, sailor-like way, and assuring him of the pleasure with which he would put down his name for the club. Kind-hearted, muddle-headed Lady Croft, having a dim impression that she had been rather rude to the man who looked like a foreigner, came sailing across the room towards him presently to make amends.

"Lord Courtney tells me he saw a great deal of you in Paris. I did not know who you were at first," she began, in the nervous, plaintive accents which are habitual with her. "Freddy introduces all sorts of people to me—one never can tell—I beg your pardon, I'm sure. Is Mrs. Gervis—I mean the Princess er—er—I am *so* stupid about names—Ouranoff, thank you—is she here to-night? No? Only arrived this

afternoon? Oh, then of course she would be much too tired; and besides, I don't know why anybody should come into such a rabble, unless there were a necessity for it. I shall hope to have the pleasure of calling upon her soon. How hot it is here, is it not? And how these people push one about? *Would* you mind taking me into the next room to have a cup of tea?"

Few persons, I should imagine, can ever have been left ten minutes alone with Lady Croft without having been put in possession of full details with regard to that much-tried lady's most recent family trouble. The troubles of the Crofts, real or imaginary, have occupied her whole mind for so many years that she is now scarcely able to talk connectedly upon any other subject; and there is a *naïveté* in her innocent conviction that what interests her must interest the rest of the world which goes far towards securing for her the sympathy she claims. Mr. Gervis was hardly the sort of man whom an ordinary individual would have felt drawn to make a confidant of; but long before Lady Croft had finished her cup of tea, he had heard all about her perplexities and worries—of the escapades of her daughter, who had taken up with a very fast and slangy set,

and was getting herself talked about from one end of the county to the other,—of the importunities of a certain ne'er-do-well brother-in-law, who, it appeared, was perpetually clamouring for money to pay his racing debts,—and last, not least, of the alarming behaviour of Freddy with reference to that terrible Miss Lambert.

"He will marry her, Mr. Gervis; I feel convinced that he will; and I shall simply die of vexation. It is curious that I should have had a presentiment, the very first day we came down here, when I saw Freddy walking on the Esplanade with that odious girl, that some horrible calamity would fall upon us through her. And I am absolutely helpless; that is the worst of it. Freddy is, of course, his own master, and he would no more think of consulting me before taking a wife than he would of asking my opinion about a horse or a gun. And yet it stands to reason that I must be able to judge of girls much better than he can do. A mother devotes her whole life to her children, and, as soon as ever the law sets them free, they turn round and snap their fingers at her. They may commit any fatal folly they please, and she must not say a word. If she does, they quarrel with her perhaps; at the least, they hint that she had better mind her own

business. As if their business was not hers! It seems very hard."

"I suppose it does seem hard," observed Mr. Gervis placidly.

"It *is* hard. Men don't in the least realize what women—especially mothers—have to go through."

"I should think it must be horrid," said Mr. Gervis. "It can't be helped, though. If I might venture to offer a word of advice, I should recommend you to make up your mind not to care."

"How is one to help caring?"

"You can educate yourself not to care about anything; and it becomes surprisingly easy as one grows older. The truth is, that very few things are really of the slightest consequence. I dare say your son won't marry that young person with the high colour, after all; but if he does, the chances are that you will like her as much as you would anybody else after the first year."

"Mr. Gervis, would you allow your son to marry Miss Lambert?"

"Oh dear, no; but then, you see, he has no money, except what I give him; so that he is in my power. If it were not for that, I should not attempt to prevent his marrying Miss Lam-

bert, or Mrs. Lambert either, if he chose. It would be useless exertion. As it is, he will very likely have to remain a bachelor until I die; for it would be excessively inconvenient to me to do without him. Here he comes, making himself very agreeable to a particularly pretty young lady. Doubtless another siren of the Lambert tribe."

"Oh no," sighed Lady Croft; "she is a Miss Flemyng—a very nice girl, as girls go. Once I thought that Freddy was rather smitten with her; and I should have been only too *thankful* if he had been, though she has no money and is nobody in particular. But that is just an instance of the crooked way in which things go. Your son, as you say, might flirt as much as he liked with Miss Lambert, and no harm would come of it; so of course he never looks at her; whereas mine, who has nobody to protect him from himself, falls into the trap at once."

"The world is out of joint," answered Mr. Gervis, sententiously. "But it matters very little in the long run, I assure you."

"It matters a great deal to me," returned poor Lady Croft.

I need hardly say that I do not report the above dialogue as having actually reached my ears. In point of fact, at the time of its oc-

currence, I must have been well on my way towards home and bed. This history is less the result of personal observation than of information received at various times and from divers trustworthy sources; and if, in writing it, I had to confine myself to the relation of such incidents as I could swear to in a court of justice, I should not only be obliged to cut out many scenes of a most interesting and pathetic nature, but some of the characters who will make their appearance in due course would have to be omitted altogether. As for this yeomanry ball, I saw little more of it than did Lord Courtney, whose august countenance was withdrawn from the assembly after a short quarter of an hour. The truth is, that my dancing days are over; and I was able to retire early, with the happy conviction that nobody would notice my absence.

Before midnight the greater part of the ladies and gentlemen present had done likewise; for it is not, or rather used not to be, considered the thing to linger over long at these entertainments, which are intended rather for the amusement of the men than of their superiors. Lady Lynchester, a thin, washed-out looking person, who had never been heard to laugh in her life, rose from her seat at the

end of the room as soon as her lord signalled to her that she was free to go; and the Beachborough contingent, ever scrupulous in the strict observance of etiquette, hastened to follow her ladyship's lead. Then landowners from distant parts of the country, who had a long drive between themselves and home, collected their respective wives and daughters, and trooped off in a body, the departure of some stragglers, loitering near the doorway in hopes of seeing a little of the fun, being hastened by Lord Lynchester, who began to stalk about, with his hands behind his back, wondering audibly what the deuce those people were sticking there for.

But when the last of these had disappeared, there still remained a few of what the noble and gallant Colonel called "the right sort"—privileged persons, who were known to entertain no objection to a romp and could be relied upon to tell no tales next day. Conspicuous among the latter was Miss Croft, "a downright jolly girl, with no stuck-up nonsense about her"—to use Lord Lynchester's words,—"just like her brother, only more so, you know,"—a description so terse and accurate that no further space need be taken up in introducing her to the reader. Miss Lambert, although an

outsider, was included in the circle of choice spirits; probably because she carried her credentials in her face; and there were three or four young ladies besides, whose names it is unnecessary to record.

During the early part of the evening, an unspoken convention had divided the ball-room into two halves, the officers and their friends sitting and dancing at the upper end of it, while the larger and humbler portion of the assemblage disported itself at the lower; but now this imaginary barrier was swept away, together with all irksome class distinctions, and the whole floor was at the disposition of the dancers. Now, when we dance in Lynshire, we do it with a will, not skimming languidly and dreamily over the polished surface, nor lurching heavily round and round on the same spot, like humming-tops tottering to their fall, as the fashion of some effeminate citizens is; but taking a firm grip of our partner's waist and hand, putting down our heads, and starting off at a pace as good as we can make it, helter-skelter, every man for himself, and devil take the hindmost. The consequences of this energetic method, when adopted by some seventy couples in a long and narrow room, may be easily imagined. Before the first waltz was at an

end, many a stalwart yeoman had measured his length upon the well-waxed floor, and the elbows of more than one fair maiden were scratched and bruised. Every now and then a faint shriek rose from the midst of the *mêlée*, or a manly voice was heard to expostulate for a moment; but the predominant sound was that of laughter, and hard knocks seemed to be distributed pretty evenly all round, upon an amicable give-and-take principle. Fat little Wilkins, the butcher, pounding blindly ahead, and sawing the air with outstretched arm, brought his fist down with a thump on the middle of Lord Lynchester's back, and, instead of turning pale and trembling, as he would have done at any other time after such a mishap, bobbed off again as merrily as ever, with a "Beg pardon, m' lord. Didn't see yer—haw, haw, haw!" For indeed the supper-room had been open for half an hour, and it is not on every day of the year that a man can drink the best of champagne and pay nothing for it.

"All right, Wilkins!" shouted Lord Lynchester after him; "I'll make it hot for you in a minute."

And presently, sure enough, his lordship, having secured an efficient partner in Miss Croft, darted off in pursuit of the delinquent,

and proceeded to waltz round and round him in an ever-contracting circle till he reduced him to such a state of giddiness that he was fain to lean against the wall and gasp. Then, with a deft and rapid thrust in the ribs, which caused the luckless butcher to exclaim aloud, "Oh Lord!" he returned to his starting-point, and, throwing himself down upon a bench, gave way to a peal of merriment in which Miss Croft joined heartily.

Claud Gervis looked on at all this horse-play with rather wide-opened eyes. Was it in this manner that the aristocracy of Great Britain was accustomed to take its relaxation? he wondered. Of the manners and habits of his native land he was almost entirely ignorant. At Eton he had, of course, associated with many young sprigs of nobility; but rank is not recognized among boys, and Claud's impression of an English lord, which was that commonly current in foreign countries, had received confirmation from such specimens of the race as Lord Courtney and an occasional ambassador or minister plenipotentiary who had come in his way.

"What are you thinking of?" inquired his partner, that pretty Miss Flemyng of whom mention has already been made. "You look quite horrified."

"No; I am not horrified," the young man said; "but I am rather surprised, I admit. It is all so very different from what I expected. I did not think we English were ever so—so uproarious. Surely it is not usual at a ball to try and knock down as many people as one can."

"Well, hardly," answered Miss Flemyng, laughing. "But this is a yeomanry ball, you must remember; and besides, all the quiet, respectable people are supposed to be gone away."

"But Lady Croft is still here, and Miss Lambert—not to mention present company."

"Lady Croft is here because Florry won't go away; and Miss Lambert is here because she is Miss Lambert, I suppose; and I am here because I came with the Crofts. You need not say anything about it when papa comes to call upon you, by the way. He is like you—rather easily shocked."

"I am not easily shocked," returned Claud, resenting such an imputation with the natural fervour of a very young man.

"No? I thought you looked so. I am sure I should be shocked myself, if I had lived abroad all my life, and had made my first acquaintance with English society to-night.

But you mustn't suppose that Lynshire always conducts itself like this. We can behave as nicely as any one else in London; only when we find ourselves all together in our own part of the world, we think we may put on our country manners. And we are all rather savages, as you see."

Miss Flemyng did not look at all like a savage. Claud, who was rather more observant of trifles than most men, had noticed that the dress she wore was assuredly not the handiwork of a provincial artist, and that her abundant brown locks were arranged in accordance with the latest mode. She moved and held herself in the indescribable style which only a woman of the world can acquire; her manner was perfectly easy and natural, and she seemed to be upon terms of the friendliest familiarity with the young men who spoke to her, from time to time, as she stood watching the dance; but she was not loud, like her friend Miss Croft, nor did she make use of the school-boy's slang which formed so large a portion of that young lady's conversation. Her chief claim to beauty, setting aside those of a neat, well-proportioned little figure and a general air of finish, consisted in a pair of dark grey eyes, which had been turned innocently upon Claud's more than once

in the course of the evening, and had not failed to produce a certain impression upon him. He was glad to hear that Miss Flemyng lived within a few miles of Beachborough, for he thought he would decidedly like to see more of her.

"I am not going to dance any more," she said, after she and her partner had completed one perilous circuit of the room; "it's too hot and dusty and disagreeable. Do you think there is a balcony beyond that window, where the ferns are? If there is, we might go and sit there."

"I know there is," answered Claud, "because I was there earlier in the evening. And there is a particularly comfortable sofa there, too, where we can sit and watch the sea, which, after all, is a much pleasanter thing to look at on a hot night than those fat yeomen."

And now an awkward incident took place, which shows how thoughtless it is of people to bounce unexpectedly into dark corners. Claud pushed open the half-closed French window to let Miss Flemyng pass, and, following closely upon her heels—"Here is the sofa," said he.

There it was, sure enough; and there, also, were two persons, seated upon it. Moreover, one of these persons happened to be in the very act of kissing the other. And then, as fate

would have it, at that precise moment the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and threw a fine flood of silvery light upon the figures of Freddy Croft and Miss Lambert. The situation was a somewhat embarrassing one, and Claud did not mend matters by hastily whisking round and gazing out to sea, with an utterly unsuccessful pretence of having seen nothing.

Miss Flemyng was less taken aback. She calmly surveyed the luckless couple for a second, which must have seemed to them an age; and then, stooping to pick up the train of her long dress, stepped quietly back into the ball-room.

She was laughing a little when her partner rejoined her. "How too ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "I shall never forget poor Freddy's face. I hope you are discreet, and can keep a secret, Mr. Gervis."

"Of course I can," answered Claud. "I wish it had not happened, though. Croft will think it so stupid of me; and really it almost looked as if we had done it on purpose."

"Oh, he won't mind," said Miss Flemyng, placidly. "Freddy is always kissing people, and always getting caught. I dare say Miss What's-her-name won't mind much either; she looks as if she was quite accustomed to that kind of thing."

"She may be engaged to be married to him, you know," remarked Claud, feeling bound to say a word for the unfortunate lady whom his awkwardness had compromised.

"Oh, I do hope not. Poor, dear little fellow! I should be so very sorry if he were to fall into such a trap as that. He and I have known one another since we were children, and he generally tells me about all his love affairs; but I have been away, and have never seen that monstrosity of a girl till this evening. You don't think there is really any danger, do you?"

Without knowing why, Claud felt vaguely annoyed by the anxious ring of Miss Flemyng's voice. "I can't tell anything about it," he answered, rather shortly. "He seems to admire her very much, and they are always together."

"Well, I wish they were not together now; or at least that they were together anywhere except in the one cool place in the building," remarked Miss Flemyng, with a laugh. "We shall have to take refuge on the staircase, I suppose."

To the staircase they accordingly betook themselves; and in that pleasant, untrammelled intercourse which is apt to arise between young men and women under such circumstances, and which, remote though it may be from serious

love-making, is generally sweetened by some of the charms which attach to the unknown and the possible, Claud soon forgot all about Freddy Croft and his destinies. But when the last dance was over, and Claud was putting on his coat in the hall, his friend joined him, with a face preternaturally long, and said, in a solemn voice—

"I say, Gervis, let me walk a bit of the way with you, will you? I want to speak to you."

"Come along," said Claud. "Will you have a cigar?"

"Oh no," Freddy answered, shaking his head lugubriously; "I don't want to smoke."

He kept silence until he and his companion had reached the outskirts of the town, and then began—

"Do you know, Gervis, I have made an everlasting fool of myself."

"Ah! I can guess what you mean. I saw you doing it, didn't I?"

"I suppose you did. At least you saw me kissing the girl. But, dear me, that was nothing, you know."

"Wasn't it?"

"I mean, of course it was all right. I knew you and Nina Flemyng were safe enough; and really it was the sort of thing that might have

happened to anybody. But, by George, sir!" continued Freddy, impressively, "do you know what that girl did as soon as you were gone?"

"Burst into tears?" suggested Claud.

"Not she! Began to laugh, and said that, now we had been so neatly caught, the best thing we could do was 'to give out our engagement at once.' I thought she was chaffing at first; but she wasn't—deuce a bit! She was as serious as I am now."

"I can quite believe it."

"Well, but, my dear fellow," resumed Freddy impatiently, "don't you see what a horrid mess I am in? I never meant anything of that kind at all; and how was I to suppose that she did? I don't want to marry anybody; and Miss Lambert of all people! She's a very jolly girl, and a first-rate dancer, and all that; but as for spending the rest of one's life with her!—Oh, I'm simply done for, and I shall go and drown myself in the harbour."

"I don't think I would decide upon doing that quite yet," remarked the other young man pensively.

"What *would* you do, if you were in my place?"

"I should run away, I think. Have you committed yourself to anything definite?"

"Oh no. In point of fact, I rather tried to laugh the whole thing off; but she wouldn't have that at any price. And the worst of it is, I'm afraid she has told her mother. The old girl gave me a very queer sort of look when I put her into her carriage, and said she would expect to see me to-morrow afternoon."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I? Oh, I said 'Good-night.'"

"That was vague enough, certainly," observed Claud, laughing. "Well, I have an idea. I think I can get you out of this. Only you must promise me not to see Mrs. or Miss Lambert till you hear from me again. Most likely I shall be with you before the afternoon."

"My dear fellow, I won't stir out of my bedroom," answered the affrighted baronet, earnestly. "I'll stay in bed, if you like. Oh, if only I escape this time, not another woman under sixty years of age do I speak to!"

"It is possible to speak to young women without kissing them," Claud remarked sagely.

"It isn't easy, though," returned the other, sighing. "The safest plan is to let 'em alone."

"Ah, you are of Villon's opinion."

"Who was he?" inquired Sir Frederick. And Claud, laughing, quoted a recent translation of that mediæval miscreant—

". . . . Trust them, and you're fooled anon ;
For white or brown, and low or high,
Good luck has he that deals with none ! "

With which sweeping judgment upon the sex the friends parted.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRUISE OF THE "SIREN."

"Upon my word, Gervis, it's awfully kind of you, and I should enjoy the cruise above everything," said Freddy Croft; "but, look here—is it absolutely necessary for me to write to the old woman?"

"I think it would look better if you did."

"But lawyers and fellows always say it is the greatest mistake in the world to commit yourself to writing," objected Freddy, biting the top of his pen. "And I'm such a duffer at explaining things; I shall be sure to make a mess of it. What sort of thing ought one to say? I wish you'd dictate it to me."

"Very well; I will, if you like. I should make it something like this: 'My dear Mrs. Lambert.' Have you got that?"

"All right. Drive on."

"'My dear Mrs. Lambert,

"'Gervis has just come in to tell me that he has made up a party for a rather long cruise in his father's yacht, and he insists upon my joining it. We must get out of harbour with the next tide, he says; so I shall barely have time to pack up my things, and I am afraid I cannot possibly run round to bid you and Miss Lambert good-bye. My plans are always very uncertain, and you will, of course, have left Beachborough long before I return home; but the world is so small, that we are sure to meet again some time or other; and I need not say that I look forward to a renewal of our acquaintance with the greatest pleasure.'"

"That *is* a buster!" remarked the docile scribe parenthetically.

"Scratch it out, if you choose; but it means nothing, and it sounds polite. I don't think you need say any more, except that you are writing in great haste, and that, with kind remembrances to Miss Lambert, you are hers sincerely."

"'Yours sincerely, F. Croft,'" muttered the other, signing his name, and folding up the short note. "Yes, I think that will about do. I feel rather like a brute, though."

"You don't enjoy the sensation of running

away: nobody does," remarked Claud. "But one has to choose between doing that and being eaten up, sometimes."

"What a hard-hearted beggar you are! Ah, it's all very well to laugh; but Miss Lambert isn't half such a bad girl as you think. I wish to goodness there was no such thing as marriage! Shall I send my fellow round with this now?"

"Not unless you want to have Mrs. Lambert here in a quarter of an hour. I think it had better not be put into her hands before we are well under way. She can hardly give chase, unless she charters a steam-tug."

The two young men were sitting in the deserted upper chamber of the Courtney Arms, which, for the previous ten days, had served as the officers' mess-room of the Royal Lynshire Yeomanry Cavalry. Reminiscences of the last breakfast partaken of together by those brave defenders of their county and country still covered the long table, in the shape of empty dishes and cups, fragments of rolls and dirty plates. Freddy had pushed his on one side to make room for the blotting-book and inkstand by the help of which he had shaken himself free from Miss Lambert's toils.

"Ghastly-looking scene, ain't it?" he re-

marked. "That's the worst of this Yeomanry business. Just when fellows have got to be comfortable together, and to understand one another's ways, the whole thing comes to an end. What a blessing that one hasn't got to stay on in this place, now that they are all gone! By-the-by, Gervis, you haven't told me yet what our party is to be."

"There is no party," answered the other young man, who had seated himself upon the window-sill, and was swinging his long legs and gazing down at the sunny street beneath him; "that was only a figure of speech. The fact is, that it was not until I was walking up the hill last night that I decided to ask the governor for the use of the yacht at all. I wanted to take my sister away somewhere for a time, because I—because of some family reasons; and of course there was not time to invite any one else. Oh, you need not look alarmed; I am not going to lead you into any fresh troubles. You are very unlikely indeed to fall in love with Gen, and I think I can promise that she will not become enamoured of you, saving your presence. And Miss Potts will be there to play dragon."

"My dear fellow, I didn't look alarmed; and I'm sure I don't want any dragon. Who is she?"

"Miss Potts? Well, she is Miss Potts—a nonentity, a lay figure—at all events, so far as you, or any other strangers, are concerned. She was my sister's governess once upon a time. Now I don't exactly know what she is—a sort of companion, I suppose you would call her. I am afraid you will find it all rather dull work, Croft; but there's no help for it. I have sent a note to old Knowles to ask whether he would care to come with us."

And I am credibly informed that the young baronet's rejoinder to this announcement was, "Oh, hang old Knowles!"

Pressed to explain this most unseemly and uncivil ejaculation, he proceeded, with his usual engaging candour: "Old Knowles isn't a bad old chap; only he will insist upon knowing all about his neighbour's business. Always asking questions and wanting to know all about everything. I've known him all my life, and I like him very well in his way; but he's a regular old Paul Pry, and that's the truth. I'd bet any money he hears the whole of this confounded affair of mine before we have been an hour on board."

I suppose that no more unfounded charge has ever been made since the day when the two men of Belial swore away the life of

Naboth the Jezreelite. My failings and shortcomings are doubtless many, and I hope that I am not unconscious of the greater part of them; but that I, of all people in the world, should be accused of being a Paul Pry is really just a little too absurd. I protest that I have never sought any man's confidence; but surely it is no crime to take an interest in one's fellow-mortals; and why is it that so many people have chosen to make me the depository of their secrets, unless because I am generally held to be a pre-eminently safe man? And if, as a matter of fact, I did hear the whole of Freddy's "confounded affair" before I had been an hour on board the *Siren*, who was it, pray, who related it to me in fullest detail from beginning to end? Who asked my opinion upon his past behaviour, and begged for my advice as to his future line of conduct? "Ach, mein lieber Sulzer," said Frederick the Great, "er kennt nicht diese verdammte Race!"—and I declare that, when that ungrateful speech of Frederick the little's was reported to me, I felt, as I often do, very much inclined to compare myself to the worthy Berlin school-inspector, and to wonder whether a good thick coat of selfishness and indifference is not, after all, a sensible man's best wear.

But these are personal matters, and have no direct bearing, I admit, upon the narrative in hand. What is certain is that, when the *Siren* cleared out of Beachborough harbour that afternoon, there might have been seen, reclining on a low wicker chair on her deck, a middle-aged gentleman of prepossessing exterior, the expression of whose countenance appeared to indicate—what in truth was the case—that he was contented with his company and was fully persuaded that his company was equally contented with him.

The situation, indeed, was one conducive to quiet satisfaction and oblivion of all petty worries. Ahead lay the broad blue sea, flooded with sunshine and swept by flying shadows from the summer clouds; astern was Beachborough, where people were just beginning to emerge from the houses for their afternoon stroll; and behind Beachborough were the woods of Southlands; and behind the woods, the hills, and behind the hills, the world. It was at least our world that we were parting from; and if there be a sensation calculated to fill a man's mind with peace, surely it is that of sailing away from all ties, duties and associations, and leaving no address behind him. The first strains of the band

were wafted to us, mellowed by distance, as we glided past the pier-heads; the men, in their blue jerseys and red caps, were hauling up the mainsail, Claud and Freddy lending superfluous aid, and making themselves very hot over it, as the manner of yachtsmen is; three idle persons, seated near the top of the companion, were watching the proceedings in silence, ducking their heads, every now and then, as the heavy boom swung over. The reader having already made acquaintance with the first and humblest of this trio, it only remains to introduce to him its two other members.

Any one who has seen the conventional French caricature of the *vieille miss anglaise* has seen Miss Potts; any one who has read an incidental sketch of an English lady-companion in a French novel is familiar with her peculiarities. She had the projecting teeth, the flaxen curls, the rigid backbone and the angular outline so dear to "Cham" and a host of others; and the moment I looked at her, I felt sure that she professed an extravagant prudishness, frequently made use of the word "shocking," ate much, spoke little, and employed her spare time in the production of washy water-colour sketches. I don't pretend

to say why this gross libel upon our national type should be so commonly met with in the flesh on the other side of the channel, and yet be extinct, or nearly so, on this; but the fact is undeniable; and Miss Potts's counterparts are to be seen following in the wake of most of the well-born young ladies of continental Europe. Increased intimacy with that very estimable person confirmed my intuition with regard to her in every particular, and further revealed that her life was influenced by two ruling passions—adoration of her charge, and abhorrence of her charge's father.

Miss Gervis is less easy to describe. In the course of the six months that followed her entrance into Lynshire society I had various opportunities of hearing her discussed, and I am bound to say that the usual verdict upon her personal appearance was by no means what my own opinion of it would have led me to expect. Everybody admitted that she had fine eyes, and most people had also remarked her eyelashes, which were exceptionally long; but the fact of her having a brother whom she closely resembled, yet whose features were decidedly more regular than her own, was so patent that her critics seemed unable to get over it, and invariably ended by remarking

what a pity it was that he should be so much the better-looking of the two. It is the old story: the many hate the risk and trouble of forming and declaring their own tastes, and prefer to accept their standard of the beautiful, as they do their religion and the cut of their clothes, from experts. We are somewhat behind the age down in Lynshire, and have hardly realized as yet that regularity of outline has fallen a little out of fashion.

I am afraid that my poor powers are quite unequal to defining the charm that Geneviève Gervis had for me from the first. A vague something, describable only in vague language —which I, as a plain man and no poet am averse to—a pathetic, far-away look in the large dark eyes, a certain wistfulness about the slow, unfrequent smile, a grace and languor of movement, betraying southern blood, a general air of quiet suppression rather painful to witness in a girl just entering on life—all these, combined with something, which, for lack of a better word, I suppose I must call her individuality, made up a whole entirely above the cut-and-dried canons by which it is commonly sought to measure and judge beauty. As she sat on the deck of the yacht there, gazing out at the far horizon, she roused

my interest as well as my admiration; for I felt convinced that she had a "history." But there I was mistaken. History, in that acceptation of the term, she had none; nor was there anything in the records of her girlhood to justify a special air of melancholy. Who had ever ill-used her? Certainly not that urbane, cynical father of hers, who spent so little of his time beneath his own roof; not flighty, foolish Varinka, who would not have harmed a fly; nor Claud, the best of brothers, as he was the best of sons; nor the faithful and devoted Potts. When a girl who has liberty and amusing society and plenty of pocket-money persists in looking unhappy, may she not fairly be set down as silly and fanciful, and in need of what old maids call "a good shaking," to bring her to her senses? I don't know that anybody had ever said this to Geneviève; but I suspect that more than one person had said it *of* her—whether justly or unjustly the reader may decide when he shall know her better.

But now mainsail, foresail, jib and topsails are set; the *Siren*, heeling over under a steady breeze from the land, is rushing through the water at a good ten knots an hour speed; the two young men come aft, Freddy Croft to pour

the tale of his misadventures into my sympathetic ear, and Claud to reassure Miss Potts, who is nervous at sea; we are fairly off on our voyage, and the odd thing is that not one of us has as yet thought of inquiring whither we are bound. I suppose we all felt that the question of our destination was one of secondary importance. Claud, no doubt, had plans; but it was just as well that he should keep them to himself. So long as we were free, and had a good ship under us, a clear sky over us, and a fair wind to send us on our way, what signified petty details?

> "We knew the merry world was round,
> And we might sail for evermore."

As a matter of fact, however, we did not get further than Portsmouth harbour that night. We went below to dinner with the coast of Sussex showing like a mere cloud-bank where the sea met the sky; but when we came up again the Isle of Wight was close upon our lee-bow; ahead of us, between it and the mainland, two strange-looking circular forts rose abruptly out of the deep; and it was evident that we were to pass the night in smooth water.

Miss Potts heaved a sigh of gentle satisfaction as she perceived our position. "It is so

very dangerous to sail during the darkness," she murmured. "I never venture to undress until I know that the anchor is down. This seems to be a nice sheltered spot. I trust that we shall make it our head-quarters, and return here every evening."

"Well, I don't know for certain," said Freddy, in a confidential tone; "but I did hear a rumour that we were to get under way for America before daybreak."

"For America!" cried poor Miss Potts, aghast. "Impossible! You cannot be serious, Sir Frederick."

"Oh, yes. It is quite a common thing for yachts to cross the Atlantic nowadays, you know; and, after all, one doesn't often hear of their being lost—not *very* often, at least. The great danger is being driven out of one's course, or having a long spell of contrary winds. Then, of course, one may run short of provisions, and have to live upon odds and ends of things for a time; but that would be rather fun, don't you think so? I recollect hearing of one party who supported life for a week upon candles, after the biscuits gave out, and then they ate their boots, and then they fell to gnawing the rigging, and then——"

"Geneviève, my dear child," interrupted Miss

Potts, "let us go on shore at once. Your brother may do as he likes; but I am responsible for you, I believe; and such an escapade as Sir Frederick describes would be not only dangerous, but in the highest degree improper. Mr. Claud, I am very sorry to be troublesome, but I must ask you to order the gig to be ready in half an hour."

"Quite out of the question, Miss Potts," answered Claud seriously. "I regret to have to inform you that the gig has sprung a leak, and that some one has taken the plug out of the cutter, and lost it. So you see, neither of them will be available to-night."

Miss Potts sighed, but did not allow her resolution to be shaken. "I have a duty to perform," said she. "Sooner than risk finding myself out in the Atlantic to-morrow morning, I will go on shore in the dingey."

"Then," remarked Freddy, "it's all up. You will be swamped to a moral, and both of you will be drowned; because I happen to know that not a man of the crew can swim two yards."

"Don't answer him, Miss Potts," said Geneviève. "He is only talking nonsense, and he would be as frightened as you are if he thought we were really going to cross the ocean."

From all of which it will be perceived that a pleasing familiarity had already established itself among us. Possibly the fact that certain members of our small party were of an exceptionally genial temperament may have had something to do with this; but no five people cooped up on board a yacht together can remain long upon distantly polite terms. They may become friends, or they may quarrel: mere acquaintances they can hardly continue to be. Life, indeed, in its social aspect, with all its complications and their causes and effects, resolves itself pretty much into a question of propinquity; and those who, carelessly or deliberately, throw their fellow-mortals together take a vast responsibility upon themselves.

The credit of the above sage reflection belongs not to me, but to Claud Gervis, who gave utterance to it in my presence on the second morning of our cruise, and who meant his words to apply to those whom we had left behind us rather than to the company assembled on board the *Siren*, which at that moment was plunging through a fine rolling sea off the Needles. Geneviève, by means of a judicious arrangement of hassocks and rugs, had jammed herself firmly between the cabin skylight and the lee-bulwarks; Freddy was sprawling on the

deck beside her; Miss Potts was below, with a prayer-book and a smelling-bottle; and my young friend and I, standing somewhat uncomfortably on the weather side, were steadying ourselves by holding on to the rigging.

"I was determined," says this astute schemer, "to give them a chance. I may have been utterly wrong; but I thought it was at least worth trying. They have never, in my recollection, been alone together for a day; and now they will have a fortnight, or perhaps more. If they disagree—well, we are no worse off than we were before. But don't you think it is a great deal more likely that they will find out that they have misunderstood one another, and that they will shake hands?"

I replied by some of the usual commonplaces referring to differences between husband and wife, and the proverbial fate of those who attempt to adjust them.

"Ah, but you do not understand," rejoined Claud. "How should you, when I do not understand myself? nor any one else either, I sometimes think. It is all a misunderstanding. Varinka says she is misunderstood. The governor says nothing; but he is not a happy man, as you must have observed; and he has a softer heart than people give him credit for.

Also he has too keen a sense of the ridiculous not to see the absurdity of two persons being shut up together in a country house, meeting a dozen times a day, and passing on with a bow. I think Varinka will make the first advance—she will be so horribly bored that she will not be able to help it—and if he does not meet her half-way, he will at least listen to her, and so they will get into conversation, and he will end by finding her as charming as every one else does."

"And will she find him equally charming?"

"She will, if he chooses that she should, you may be sure. No one can be more agreeable than the governor, when he likes. Certainly he does not often like; but that is because he so seldom thinks it worth while to exert himself for the benefit of strangers. And I suppose no one can expect to get on with a total stranger without some exertion."

"It is a question of temperament," says Claud's observant hearer, with a glance at the other side of the deck.

Indeed, I do not imagine that the favourable impression which Freddy Croft produced upon all sorts and conditions of men and women was due to any conscious effort on his part, or that, in prostrating himself at Miss Gervis's feet, he

was doing otherwise than obeying the instinct which invariably led him to the neighbourhood of the youngest and prettiest lady within reach. I did not overhear what he and Geneviève were talking about, being, as I have said, to the windward of them; but, judging by the peals of laughter which rose, from time to time, on the wind, they must have found one another highly entertaining; and when I saw Freddy carefully wrapping his mackintosh about his neighbour's shoulders to protect her from the spray, I perceived that the reign of Miss Lambert was already a thing of the remote past.

"Un clou chasse l'autre," muttered I to myself; but I did not repeat the observation when Claud asked me what I had said, for I thought we had had enough of personal topics for that morning, and besides, one never knows how young men will take speeches of that kind where their sisters are concerned.

When we had sighted Ventnor, and were in smoother water, Miss Potts appeared, looking a trifle pale and dazed, and was much relieved to hear that our programme for the day comprised nothing more ambitious than a sail round the island, and that we should probably reach our safe moorings again before dinner time.

"That is by far the better and wiser plan," said she. "I do not know whether your experience coincides with mine, Mr. Knowles; but, although I am not unaccustomed to yachting, I have never yet succeeded in reconciling myself to swinging tables. The illusion of stability which they convey to one of the senses, while the others are conscious of incessant and distressing motion, always seems to me to make the maintenance of personal equilibrium a doubly difficult task."

It was in this ponderous style that Miss Potts was in the habit of expressing herself when time was given her to choose her words carefully. She prided herself, I believe, upon the purity of her English, and would sometimes boast that not one of the foreign young ladies who had acquired our language under her tuition had ever been heard to make use of any of those vulgar idioms now too common in polite society.

"Of course, if you will persist in grasping the edge of the table for support whenever the vessel gives a lurch, you will find its stability an illusion and your personal equilibrium nowhere," remarked Claud. And after this, it became a standing joke with us to inquire after Miss Potts's personal equilibrium every morning.

We had many a joke together during that ten days' cruise; but I refrain from reporting them, for the above, which may be taken as a fair sample of their quality, will sufficiently show that they were not remarkable for any great brilliancy of wit. We laughed a great deal; and the truth is that it did not take very much to make us laugh. When I think of the voyage of the *Siren* from Beachborough to Portsmouth, and from Portsmouth to Swanage and Weymouth, and so along the Devonshire coast to Torquay, and the long, lazy days at sea, and the rambles on shore, and the swim in the early morning, and the last cigar on deck at night, and Evans the skipper's yarns, and Freddy Croft's novel practical jokes—when, I say, I recall these things, I can't, for the life of me, tell why I, a mere outsider and spectator, should have enjoyed it all so much. It was a great success, that yachting trip; but it was a wholly uneventful one; and of its various episodes two only stand out clearly from the rest in my memory—a discovery which we made the night when we lay for the second time in Portsmouth harbour, and the squall which caught us in Torbay, and carried away our main-topmast.

There was a piano in the main-cabin—a

jingling old instrument of the kind which one expects to meet with on board ship—its upper notes hopelessly flat, and its whole internal economy impaired by moisture and rough usage. Once or twice Claud had sat down before it, and picked out a few bars of a waltz; and sometimes Freddy, who, when he was not talking, was always whistling or singing, would favour us with a stirring accompaniment to one of his music-hall ditties; but it was such a vile old thing, that it never occurred to either of us strangers to ask Miss Gervis to perform upon it. One evening, however, she chose to do so uninvited; and the moment her fingers touched the yellow keys I, for one, knew that we had an artist among us.

I said as much to Miss Potts, who seemed pleased, and nodded her head emphatically in reply. "We have lived a good deal in the musical world in Paris," she whispered, "and Geneviève's playing was thought very highly of by the best judges; but if you are fond of music, it is her violin that you ought to hear. My dear," she added aloud, "will you bring your violin out? Mr. Knowles expresses a desire——"

"I think, if I did, Mr. Knowles would soon express a desire for me to put it back again,"

answered the girl, glancing over her shoulder, while she continued to play softly. "I should make a great deal too much noise for this tiny cabin."

"She wants to be pressed," said Claud. "Why was the violin brought on board, if it wasn't meant to be used, Gen?"

To this pertinent inquiry Miss Gervis vouchsafed no reply; but by way, I suppose, of showing us that there was at least no ground for the inference which Claud had drawn from her hesitation, she rose immediately and disappeared into her cabin, whence she presently emerged, bearing the instrument carefully and tenderly in her arms, after the manner of violinists, as though it had been a sentient creature. As soon as, with the aid of Miss Potts and the piano, she had tuned it to her satisfaction—a work of some little time and difficulty—she sat down, and, declining the elder lady's offer of accompaniment, began to play.

When I was a young man—in the era, that is to say, of pointed waists, bare arms, ringlets, and heelless shoes, attached to the wearer's foot by sandals—the harp used to be considered one of the most powerful auxiliaries of feminine charms; and I dare say that, in the year 1850,

the spectacle of a fiddle-playing lady would have been held more deserving of ridicule than of admiration; but the times change, and we with them; and I suppose that nowadays the grace of the violinist's attitude would no more be disputed than the insipid tinkling which used to delight our ears would be compared to the divine harmony of the horse-hair and the cat-gut. If, after shaving to-morrow morning, the reader will take the trouble to raise his strop to his shoulder, to execute a pass or two across it with his comb, and to survey himself the while in his looking-glass, he will at once perceive the serious and rapt air conferred upon his features by that obligatory bend of the head and outward glance; and although it is possible that he may not be possessed of a pair of eyes as large and soft, or of eyelashes as long as Miss Gervis's, yet imagination will doubtless help him a little here, and he will gain some notion of what it was that we saw in the dim main-cabin of the *Siren* on that summer's evening. What we heard I shall not attempt to describe. I am not a musical critic, and were I to state honestly the effect produced upon me by Geneviève's playing, I should probably say some very absurd things, and convey an entirely false idea of her talent. Her execu-

tion, as I afterwards heard from competent judges, was faulty and her method unorthodox; but I do not fancy that, if I had been informed of this at the time, it would in any way have lessened my pleasure in listening to her. I have forgotten, if I ever knew, what it was that she played. As far as I remember, it was only a plaintive air, or succession of airs. The charm lay in the manner, not the matter. When amateurs wish to praise a musician who has pleased them, and are at a loss to define the secret of his power, they generally speak of his performance as "sympathetic." The adjective, in fact, has been made use of so unsparingly, of late years, that one has grown a little tired of it; but it has the advantage of being comprehensible; and, indeed, I suppose that it could have been only by the evoking of some common sympathy that Geneviève kept our little company silent and spell-bound for so long as she did.

That Freddy Croft was profoundly impressed his open mouth and the awe-struck admiration in his blue eyes sufficiently testified; nor have I the slightest doubt in my own mind that Geneviève's reign over the heart of this susceptible young gentleman is to be dated from that hour. When the last notes had died away,

he relieved himself by a suppressed ejaculation, which, to an understanding ear, spoke volumes. What he said (for I happened to overhear him) was only "By *George!*" but it must be borne in mind that Sir Frederick belongs to an epoch and a school whose vernacular is nothing if not compendious. After this, it became an established custom that Miss Gervis should play to us every evening; and her melodies were always of the same order, old Italian ballads or plaintive French peasant lays—suited, I suppose, to the capacity of the audience, for Miss Potts was careful to explain that her pupil had studied under the first masters, and was capable of performances very different in difficulty from any that we had heard from her.

The crew used to steal up to the open skylights, and listen. I caught glimpses of their red caps sometimes against a strip of starry sky. The steward would dawdle about in one of the cabins, leaving the door ajar; the captain generally posted himself half-way down the companion, pretending to consult the weather-glass. During that hour the whole ship's company was under the spell of the enchantress; and one of them, I think, was so successfully bewitched that he made no effort to recover his liberty for the remainder of the twenty-four.

Freddy Croft was no adept at hiding his feelings. If he disliked a man, he went as near telling him so as the customs of an over-sophisticated age will allow; if, on the other hand, he took a fancy to a new acquaintance, he began calling him "old fellow," slapping him on the back, and playing practical jokes upon him immediately. Now, being fully persuaded that Geneviève was his first and last love, he followed her about like a dog, and paraded his adoration in so open a manner that I was sometimes afraid lest Claud should think it his duty to make some remark upon it, and that so the harmony of our party might be disturbed. But nobody ever minded Freddy Croft. Even Miss Potts, whose views of flirtation in the abstract were those of an English old maid imbued with continental notions as to the bringing up of young ladies, would only smile when he showed some signal mark of infatuation, and whisper to me that Sir Frederick was a very charming young man; but mercurial, she feared—too mercurial. As for the object of this unstinted worship, she appeared to me to take it much as the rest of us did, rather as a joke than a reality, and to accept her slave's homage graciously, but without attaching too much importance to it. And so every one was contented, and the

days went merrily by, and the prologue of this narrative approached its close.

It must have been about a fortnight from the time of our start, when, one hot, airless night, we drifted into Torbay. We had been loitering along the coast, without any definite plan, stopping where the fancy took us, or as the winds and tides suited. Something had been said about visiting the Channel Islands, or running across to Cherbourg; but as none of us cared much in which direction our course might be shaped, except Miss Potts, who expressed a very decided opinion in favour of keeping in sight of the English coast, these projects had been allowed to drop; and now, pursuing our slow westward course, we were making for Torquay, having got belated, after a long day of calms and varying light airs.

"What is it going to be, Evans?" asked Claud, sauntering aft towards the skipper, who held the tiller, and glancing up at the flapping sails. Any chance of a breeze, do you think?"

"We're a-going to have it poor and paltry, I'm afraid, sir. As much as we shall do to get the anchor down by midnight."

The air was heavy and close. In the afternoon a thunderstorm had broken far away to the southward; and that part of the heavens

was still obscured by a bank of black clouds, against which the summer lightning flashed incessantly; but overhead the stars twinkled in a clear sky, the wind, what there was of it, coming in fitful puffs off the land. Geneviève and Freddy were leaning over the lee bulwarks, watching the phosphorescent light on the sea; Miss Potts was below; and I, stretched full-length upon a rug, was enjoying a cigar and one of those pleasing reveries which belong neither to wakefulness nor sleep. Possibly I may have crossed the border; at all events, it seemed to me that I had barely lost consciousness for a minute when I was startled by a shout from Evans behind me. Some stir and commotion was going on; I heard the sound of bare feet running on the deck; I glanced upwards, and saw that the stars had vanished; and then there came a roar and a shriek through the air, a shower of spray drenched me to the skin, and I was shot head over heels to the other side of the vessel.

"I expected this," I muttered, as I picked myself up; but no one heard this audacious assertion through the howling of the wind and the hissing of the rain, which had now begun to fall in torrents, and it is certain that, if I had foreseen what was coming, my prescience

had not been shared by those who should have known better, for the squall had burst upon us before there had been time to shorten sail, and presently a loud crash let us know that we had carried away our main-topmast.

In the midst of the hurly-burly Miss Potts's head was seen appearing at the top of the companion.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Potts," sung out Freddy, who happened to be close by; "there's no danger—there's no fear."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Frederick," she answered, in a sepulchral voice; "there may be no danger, but I can assure you that there is a great deal of fear."

I tried to persuade her to go below again; but she waved me aside. "I know my duty," said she. "Where is Geneviève? Let me go to her."

And, catching sight of her charge, who, wrapped in an oilskin coat, was clinging to the bulwarks and watching the storm in perfect serenity, she staggered wildly across the deck, and flung her arms round her protectingly. I don't know what good the poor old soul imagined she could do; but it was rather touching to see how, in the midst of her own mortal terror, her chief thought was for her beloved pupil.

It was all over in less than a quarter of an hour. The wind and the rain swept away seawards, and from over the ragged edge of a black thunder-cloud the moon looked down upon a smoothly heaving sea. She looked down, too, upon a group which, somehow or other, has become permanently imprinted upon my mental vision. Why is it that certain people are associated in one's memory with certain circumstances, and that, in thinking of them, one's mind invariably and involuntarily recurs to some particular scene? Whenever my thoughts turned to Geneviève during the months that elapsed before we met again, I pictured her to myself as she stood that night in Torbay, upon the wet deck, her tarpaulin coat flung back from her shoulders, her dark hair a little blown about by the storm and glistening with spray-drops, the angry cloud-rack behind her, and the moonbeams falling upon that curious, wistful face. Miss Potts had not stirred from the attitude into which she had thrown herself in her first agitated impulse, and still clung tightly to the erect girlish form which seemed more fitted to lend support than to claim it. Facing this oddly-contrasted pair, and between me and them, were Claud and Freddy Croft, two dark,

indistinct figures. I dare say my fancy may have been influenced in a great measure by what I had already been told about Miss Gervis's life and prospects; but it appeared to me, while I gazed at her in that weird light, as if she were standing alone in a stormy world, with no one but her trembling, grotesque-looking ex-governess to lend her a helping hand. I was making myself quite unhappy over it, when Freddy, in a loud, cheerful voice, said it was about time for a brandy-and-soda all round, after that. And so the group broke up, and my rather sinister vision was dispelled.

The next morning Claud and I went ashore to get our letters from the post-office; for, after all, it is not so easy to cut one's self off from civilization at a moment's notice, and I had found myself obliged to post a line at Lyme Regis, giving a clue to my whereabouts. Now, as I had expected, a fine crop of letters was waiting for me at Torquay, more than one of which made it advisable for me to leave for London by the first express train.

"Everything must have an end," says I consolingly, looking up from my correspondence at my companion, who lifted his eyes, with a rather chapfallen air, from his.

"I suppose so," he answered, sighing. "The misfortune is that things will not always end in the way they ought. Read this: it does not sound very hopeful, I'm afraid." And he handed me the following characteristic note.

"Southlands, 15th July, 187—.

"My dear Claud,

"Your communication of this morning was a relief to me, for I was beginning to dwell with some uneasiness upon the extreme awkwardness of the situation that would develop itself in the event of your having been all drowned. It distresses me to cut short what seems to be a most enjoyable cruise; but I fear I must ask you to return here as quickly as you can. We have been doing our duty, the Princess and I, to the best of our ability. The nobility and gentry of the district have called upon us, and we have returned their visits. I think I may say that I have committed no solecisms, while the Princess has achieved that success which her many amiable qualities entitle her to expect. She now reminds me that the villa which she has taken for the summer-season at Trouville has been standing vacant for some weeks, and that if Geneviève is to accompany her thither, she ought to lose no further time

in packing up her clothes and buying the necessary new ones.

"Our life here is conducive to health and admirably suited to contemplative natures; but it lacks that element of excitement which ladies accustomed to Parisian society naturally require. In fact, if it were not for a near neighbour of ours, Flemyng by name, and old Mr. Knowles—both of whom are delightful characters in their way—it is just possible that I might find it a trifle wearisome myself.

"I hope young Croft's rest has not been disturbed by anxious thoughts of the girl he left behind him. Two days after your departure, the mother came up here, demanded to see me, and made such a noise that the servants were scandalized, and I fear jumped to mistaken conclusions. I waited until she had exhausted herself, and then gave her a glass of wine and begged her to go away, assuring her that I had not the most distant idea what had become of her faithless swain. I have since ascertained that she and her daughter have left the neighbourhood; so Croft may return in safety.

"I shall be obliged if you will send me a telegram, on receipt of this, to say that you will be back in the course of three days. If

the wind is contrary, the railway will restore you to your eager family.

"Affectionately,

"V. G."

Certainly, as Claud said, it did not sound very hopeful. I magnanimously forbore, however, to remind him that I had considered his experiment a doubtful one from the first, and, for want of something better to say, reverted to my original undeniable proposition that everything must have an end; adding that I, for my part, must start, that same evening, for London, and suggesting that we might perhaps all travel together. But with a rising barometer and a fine westerly breeze blowing steadily in from the Atlantic, Claud would not hear of railway trains; and so, in the course of a few hours, I found myself bidding adieu to the new friends who already seemed like old ones, and whom I hoped never to lose sight of permanently again.

They all came up to the station to see me off; and Miss Potts actually forgot decorum so far as to wave her pocket-handkerchief when the train began to move and I stood at the carriage window, bowing a last farewell, with my hat in my hand.

I take off my hat to the reader too. The time has come for me to retire from the foot-lights and cease to distract the attention of the audience from the principal actors, who must now set about playing their several parts in earnest. From time to time I shall pop in unexpectedly, no doubt, much as I often do in real life; but with the progress of the drama I am in no way personally concerned; and I am conscious of having already thrust myself forward somewhat unwarrantably.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS OURANOFF.

It is marvellous—so I am informed—how little is known, or required to be known, of the antecedents of distinguished foreigners mixing in the highest circles of London society. Gossip busies itself with these eminent persons; stories are told about them, as about free-born Britons; but the general feeling appears to be that such stories are more likely to be false than true, that there is, at all events, no means of verifying them, and that, so long as the strangers have decent-sounding names, a sufficiency of money to spend, and the countenance of their resident minister or ambassador, London need ask no further questions with reference to them. And I have observed that a like generous disposition prevails in the somewhat lower stratum of society in which I have myself the honour to move. Living, as we do, in a right

little, tight little island, the echoes of the continental capitals seldom reach our ears, and when they do, are apt to be received with that mixture of incredulity and contempt which their origin merits at the hands of a high-minded and truth-loving people.

But in Paris, the world's metropolis, it is otherwise. The fashionable world of that gay city, connected by family ties with every aristocracy in Europe, drawing its ever-changing recruits from the four quarters of the globe, and furnishing the language in which all nationalities have agreed to interchange ideas, is never at a loss for information as to the past lives of its members, and hears the scandals of foreign lands as London hears the scandals of the provinces. Everybody in Paris, therefore, knew, with more or less of accuracy, the history of the Princess Ouranoff's life—a history the facts of which were, as it happened, so sensational that there was little scope left for exaggeration to improve upon them.

Within a year of her first marriage, the Princess Ouranoff found herself a widow, young, wealthy, beautiful and independent; and the very first use that she made of her freedom (after erecting a handsome granite monument over the grave of the elderly gentleman who

had so obligingly provided her with a name and a fortune, and relieved her of their burdensome adjunct) was to start on a journey of discovery into the outer world. Russians and Americans, when they leave their respective fatherlands, gravitate invariably and inevitably towards Paris; but as the latter nation commonly make a brief halt on their way in London, so the former are wont to pause awhile at Dresden; and it was in the staid little Saxon capital that the Princess chose to pitch her wandering tent in the early days of her widowhood, ere yet the gloss was off her mourning robes or the bloom of youthful inexperience had been brushed from her mind.

It may be supposed that so rich a matrimonial prize was not suffered to remain long in seclusion, and that aspirants to the succession of the late Prince Ouranoff began to present themselves as soon as—perhaps a little sooner than—decency permitted; nor is it likely that the Princess, whom Nature had dowered with an ample stock of vanity and excitability, would in any case have held out for more than a few months against the fascinations of one or other of her suitors. But the news of her sudden alliance with Count Ladislas Ponetzky, an out-at-elbows Polish refugee, took everybody by

surprise, and was received with the greatest displeasure in high quarters at St. Petersburg.

This Ponetzky appears to have been an adventurer of the half-knave, half-dupe description so common among the ranks of patriotic conspirators. Possibly he may have told the truth in averring that he was bound, body and soul, to certain secret societies, and that his frequent and mysterious absences and his heavy calls upon his wife's purse were ordered by those whom he dared not disobey; but unfortunately he had other habits not to be accounted for by any theory of exterior influences. The poor Princess, who had allowed the man's dare-devil bearing to take her heart by storm, had a bad time of it with him, by all accounts, and was probably not long in repenting of her bargain. Be that as it may, her second husband ceased to trouble her almost as speedily as her first had done. For, the police having caught him in the streets of Warsaw, one night, disguised in costume, and in liquor, he was incontinently packed off to Siberia, and, while making an attempt to escape on his way thither, was shot dead.

The Countess Ponetzky, now for the second time a widow, hastened to throw herself at the feet of the Czar, to implore his pardon, and to

protest that her loyalty had never been shaken for a moment by the unhappy criminal who was no more. She was beautiful, she had been unfortunate, she pleaded very prettily—and she was forgiven. When Vincent Gervis, then a widower of some few years' standing, was appointed first secretary of embassy at the Russian court, and betook himself to his post with his two children, he found the Princess Ouranoff (she had resumed her first husband's name on her return home) living in great splendour at St. Petersburg, surrounded by parasites and looked upon with special favour by the Imperial family.

Gervis at that time enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most fascinating men in Europe. He was no longer young, he had never been very good-looking, but he was certainly clever, and he had the rare gift of always knowing how to say the right thing to the right person. Moreover, he had married money, and was in far easier circumstances than the general run of diplomatists ; and this of itself gave him a certain standing, the advantages of which he thoroughly understood. In short —not to waste time in chronicling unimportant details—he had no great difficulty in inducing the Princess to brave the perils of matrimony

a third time. It was a love-match, some people said. Others, of course, asserted that the Englishman knew what he was about, and cared less for his bride's golden locks than for her gold coins. Others, again, shook their heads, and hoped the Princess might not have cause to regret the surrender of her fortune and her liberty to a man old enough to be her father; while some malicious persons laughed in their sleeves, and whispered that the fair Varinka was capable of giving a middle-aged husband some anxious hours. But what every one was forced to admit, in the sequel, was that the newly-married pair lived together in perfect amity and apparent mutual devotion for more than a twelvemonth. At the expiration of that time Mr. Gervis left the diplomatic service, and set out on a tour through Germany and Switzerland with his wife, and St. Petersburg saw them no more. That some catastrophe, involving a permanent rupture between the husband and wife, took place during this journey every one is agreed; but how or when it occurred, or what its nature may have been, have always remained matters of surmise; for neither of the parties to the quarrel ever gave any explanation of it, and the two children, Claud and Geneviève, had been sent straight from

St. Petersburg to Paris under the protection of Miss Potts, and consequently could not be called as witnesses by inquiring friends.

It was in the spring of the year that the Gervis *ménage* left Russia, and in the autumn the Princess Ouranoff established herself in that commodious *premier étage* in the Chaussée d'Antin which she occupied until the imperial demolitions of a few years back drove her to the Boulevard Malesherbes. Her husband set up his household gods on the storey above; and in this strange fashion they continued to live, keeping separate establishments beneath the same roof, meeting occasionally upon terms of frigid politeness, from time to time showing themselves in the world together, but neither of them ever attempting by word or act to exercise the slightest control over the other's independence. The children formed the connecting link between the first and second floors, spending as much of their time in the one set of rooms as in the other, and bestowing perhaps the lion's share of their young affections upon the pretty, beautifully-dressed step-mother, who played with them, took them out driving in the Bois, and gave them umlimited toys and bonbons, and who was herself so childish in many ways that they felt themselves upon a footing

of equality with her, and never thought of addressing her by any other name than Varinka. And so, for a time, matters went smoothly enough, and if the children could have remained children always, the split in the household might have gone on being placidly and comfortably ignored; but when, in the natural course of things, Claud was sent to Eton, and Geneviève began to associate with other girls of her own age, it was inevitable that they should discover the antagonism that existed between their father and his wife, and perhaps no less inevitable that they should range themselves upon the one side or the other. In Claud's case no very strong feeling manifested itself, except a natural wish that two people whom he loved should be reconciled; but as the years went on, he became more and more his father's companion, and the feminine contingent were made to understand that bitter speeches about the head of the family must not be uttered in his presence. Character and circumstances converted Geneviève into a far more violent partisan. Affectionate by nature, but reserved and somewhat over-sensitive, she loved the caresses and endearing epithets of which Varinka was ever prodigal as much as she dreaded Gervis's cold smile and sarcastic

politeness. The former would devour her with kisses after a separation of twenty-four hours; the latter would go away for months at a time, and greet her with a cool nod on his return. Rightly or wrongly, she was persuaded that her father detested her; and at the time when this story opens, I fear that she was not very far from reciprocating the sentiment which she attributed to him. Miss Potts, who believed her employer to be a thoroughly wicked man—heartless, selfish, and cruel—was in a great measure responsible for this undesirable state of things; but the girl's antipathy had originated rather in pity for Varinka's supposed wrongs than in any resentment for neglect on her own score.

The Princess Ouranoff, indeed, was subject to odd, intermittent fits of terror of her husband—terror which Geneviève could only account for upon the hypothesis of some secret ill-usage, and which was wholly at variance with the cheerful little woman's customary demeanour. Sometimes, in the midst of her voluble prattle, Gervis would let fall some apparently innocent remark in his low, deliberate tones, and then the Princess's eyes would dilate, her flow of words would die away upon her lips, and she would cower before her husband, like a bird

before a snake, he watching her, the while, from between his half-closed eyelids with an unfathomable expression. Most unprejudiced observers would have guessed that the lady had a bad conscience; Geneviève burned with an indignant suspicion that what she saw was a manifestation of sheer physical fright. And such was in fact the impression which Varinka did not hesitate to convey. "L'infâme! il m'a frappée!" she sobbed out, one day, when Geneviève found her in floods of tears in her drawing-room; and the girl believed the assertion, which happened to be an entirely false one, and never forgot it, even though she could not help knowing that her step-mother was habitually and incurably untruthful. She was not the only one who had been coaxed out of a rigid impartiality of judgment by the little Princess. Everybody agreed in pronouncing Varinka charming; no one thought of judging her by ordinary standards. She was born to be a spoilt child; and as a spoilt child she was treated by all the world, with the solitary exception of her husband. At the age of thirty-five she was still as pretty and as girlish as she had ever been. Time and trouble had left no lines on her pink and white cheeks, nor was there any symptom, inward or outward,

about her of the flight of youth. She lived a merry life in the merriest of modern cities; she had as many admirers as a woman could wish for; and if there was a skeleton anywhere among her belongings, she kept it pretty successfully out of sight.

Such was the lady who welcomed Geneviève back to Southlands with an effusion which made the sober English servants stare.

"Come upstairs," she cried, passing her little arm round her step-daughter's waist; "come at once! I have a thousand things to say to you." And then, as soon as they were in Geneviève's room, with the door shut and locked—"At last!" she exclaimed, throwing herself down upon a sofa, and relieving her pent-up feelings by something between a yawn and a sigh. "Another week of that life, and decidedly I should have gone down to the sea and drowned myself!"

"Poor Varinka!" said Geneviève, compassionately. "It has been very bad, then?"

"Bad is not the word. It has been insupportable!—oh, but insupportable!" cried the Princess, whose English, though fluent and free from foreign accent, was constructed upon Gallic lines. "Imagine to yourself what a situation! Do you think I would ever have

consented to it, if I had known what it was going to be? Do you think *he* would ever have consented to it? It is that unhappy Claud who is cause of everything, with his absurd ideas. Enfin!—since it is over now!—"

"Has he—has he made you unhappy?" asked Geneviève apprehensively.

These two, in talking together of Gervis, invariably made the personal pronoun do duty for his name.

The Princess broke into a little, high-pitched, not unmelodious laugh.

"Unhappy?" she echoed; "that depends upon what you call unhappy. He has behaved very well. I also—I have behaved on ne peut mieux. But what a life! mon dieu, mon dieu, what a life! Can you not see us sitting tête-à-tête at dinner; he at one end of a long table, I at the other, both perfectly silent, and three servants staring us out of countenance? There were moments when I felt I must scream with laughter—only I was frightened, and that preserved me. You know that terrible polite manner which freezes the marrow of one's bones—'At what hour would you like the carriage to-day? It is time to return Lady Jones's visit, and, with your permission, I will accompany you.'" Here the Princess gave a

very fair imitation of her husband's languid manner and drawling enunciation. "I reply, 'Pray do not sacrifice yourself; I am capable of facing miladi alone.'—'Do not mention such an ugly word as sacrifice' (with the air of a saint and martyr); 'the duty of paying a visit of ceremony will be made more than pleasant by the charm of your society.' Then off we go, in a big barouche, through the dusty roads and lanes, *cahin-caha*. Sometimes he points out the beauties of the landscape; but more generally he lies back, with his eyes shut, and says nothing. All the time the devil is playing with my poor nerves. I experience the strangest sensations. I long to do something desperate—to tickle him or to knock off his hat. Then comes the visit. Oh, these English! one must see them in their own country homes to understand to what a point they can be stupid, ignorant, awkward! *He* likes them. He finds them good people, and amusing in their fashion. It is to irritate me that he says such things, I suppose. Two of them are to dine here to-night—a Mr. Flemyng and his daughter. She is not so bad—a pretty girl, clever and well-dressed—the only Englishwoman I have met here who is not quite a barbarian. As for him, he is a *savant*, a philosopher with white hair,

who talks, talks, talks. I do not understand him, and I do not listen to him. Ah, well! I am near the last day of it all now; and I shall not soon be caught in this country again, I promise you. Dis donc, can you be ready the day after to-morrow?"

"Of course I can be ready, if I am to go," Geneviève answered, a little absently. She had been standing at the window, looking out at one of the loveliest views in England, and perhaps had not been paying much attention to Varinka's graphic sketch of life at Southlands.

"If you are to go!" shrieked the Princess, starting up from her sofa, and pouncing upon the speaker, like an angry little sparrow. "You speak as if you would rather not go. Ah, I understand—you are like the rest; you are tired of me, and wish to drive me away. You are quite right. Desert me, and you only desert a most unfortunate woman, who never brings good luck to those whom she loves. But I thought you were more constant, Geneviève."

And the little lady hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Geneviève drew away those plump, jewelled fingers gently, and held them between her own, which were larger, firmer, and, as some people

thought, better shaped. She was accustomed to such outbreaks, and knew that there were no tears in the Princess's eyes.

"How can you talk such nonsense, Varinka?" she said. "My home has always been with you, and always will be. What other home could I have?"

The Princess was speedily pacified, and, after many embraces, offered an apology and an explanation. "I ask you a thousand times pardon for having doubted you. It was foolish of me—it was wicked—but my nerves have been upset. Listen," she went on, lowering her voice mysteriously; "I think he has a plan about you."

"A plan about me? That would be something new. In general, I doubt whether he knows that I exist when I am not in the room."

"Ah, bah! he forgets less than you think. The other day, he terrified me by asking suddenly, *àpropos* of nothing at all, whether I had found a *parti* for you yet; and when I answered that you were too young, and that I had not dreamt even of such a thing, he remarked, 'That is well; for I should not consent to her marrying a Frenchman.'"

Geneviève laughed. "Is that all?" she asked.

"That is all he said at the time; but coming

from him, that means a great deal. And afterwards he asked me whether I held very much to taking you to Trouville. I am convinced that he has the intention to marry you to some Englishman ; and probably — for you know he never speaks until he has made up his mind —he has already fixed upon the person. That young man who was on board the yacht with you is well-born and rich, is he not? All this, do you see, is done on purpose to spite me. He knows very well that I—ah!"

This sharp ejaculation was called forth by a certain change which the Princess's quick observation had detected upon the countenance of her companion. The daylight was fading fast ; but there could be no doubt that Geneviève was blushing, nor that she was struggling ineffectually to keep back a smile from her lips. The Princess saw, and jumped, as usual, to conclusions.

"It is as I suspected, then! It was he who planned this voyage. He has laid a trap for you, and already you have walked into it. No! do not answer me; I see it all. You have permitted yourself to fall in love with the first man who has paid court to you; and now I shall be left alone in the world. Was ever any one so unfortunate as I am!"

Geneviève laughed outright. "Was ever any one so unreasonable? you ought to say. If I am to be married to an Englishman, or to any one else, against my will, as you seem to expect, it will not be to Sir Frederick Croft, who is a very nice little man, but who will not ask me. Don't you know that the reason of our taking him away in the yacht was that he is desperately in love with some lady from whom his friends want to rescue him? You need not be alarmed, Varinka; that prize is not for me."

"Why did you blush, then?" asked the Princess suspiciously.

"I did not blush."

And with this audacious falsehood on Geneviève's part the colloquy came to an end; for now the sound of a distant gong was heard, and the Princess, hurrying towards the door, explained: "It is their way of announcing dinner. Come; he will be furious if he is kept waiting."

If Mr. Gervis was ever furious, he certainly did not manifest his fury through any of the ordinary channels; nor could any one have looked meeker than he did when the two ladies entered the drawing-room. He was sitting in a low armchair, twirling his thumbs, and listen-

ing with respectful attention to a hale, venerable-looking gentleman, who, with one fat hand thrust into his waistcoat and the other gently beating time to the measure of his periods, was apparently delivering a carefully-prepared speech to an audience of one. The orator broke off to shake hands with his hostess and to bow to Geneviève, and then resumed the thread of his discourse.

"Yes, my dear Mr. Gervis, education, if bestowed in the manner now proposed, will prove a curse to this country, not a blessing. It has been truly said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Dangerous, I would add, in more ways than one. So long as the labouring classes remain totally ignorant they will accept their lot in life as a necessity, and will consent to be led by those who know better than they can do what is best for them. But teach the working-man to read, and then leave him to himself, and what is the result? Why, that, instead of reading what will open his mind and lead him towards a true understanding of the nature of things, he turns to the vile newspapers whose sole mission it is to make him dissatisfied. Knowledge is like a nettle. Touch it, and it will sting you; grasp it firmly, and—and—er——"

"You can make soup of it," suggested Gervis.

"Just so. The very illustration I was about to employ. From the earliest times, it has been a necessity of social life that the ruder kinds of manual labour should be performed by the ignorant; and if you insist upon educating these people against their will, the end of it all will be that—among other things—you will have no agricultural labourers left."

Geneviève listened with some interest to the handsome old gentleman who stated his opinions with so much sonorous decision. Of the merits of the question which he was discussing she knew nothing; nor was it so much what he said as the way in which he said it that, taken in conjunction with an expansive forehead and flowing white hair, impressed her with the conviction that she was in the presence of a man of wisdom and experience. Such was in fact the character which Mr. Flemyng bore among his neighbours, upon whom the capacious forehead and the silvery locks had not been without their effect. A country gentleman who had never mounted a horse nor fired a shot must, these good folks reasonably argued, have something phenomenal about him; and as Mr. Flemyng was evidently not a lunatic, it

had long been agreed upon all hands to set him down as a genius. The ascertained fact that he spent the best part of his time in his library seemed to add confirmation to this view; and now for many years Mr. Flemyng had been known throughout the length and breadth of Lynshire as a very superior person indeed. Mrs. Knowles, it is true, had been heard to assert that he was the biggest fool that ever stood in two shoes; but Mrs. Knowles's judgments were notoriously emphatic rather than just, and it was thought that, being herself a superior person, she might not be wholly free from jealousy of a possible rival.

At the dinner-table Geneviève found herself seated next to the sage, who, before long, condescended to address her directly.

"You have lived all your life abroad, Miss Gervis, I understand. Now, how does England strike you, looking at it, as you must do, from a foreigner's point of view?"

Geneviève began to think that a man who could ask so exasperatingly silly a question as this could hardly be a modern Solomon, after all.

"I am an Englishwoman, although I was brought up abroad," she answered, an answer of some kind being necessary.

"Just so—just so. I myself am a cosmopolitan. Much as I value the privileges of a British subject, I cannot help seeing that the French have the advantage of us in some respects, the Germans in others, and the Italians, again, in others. Patriotism consists in serving one's country, not in extolling it at the expense of the rest of the civilized world."

"I have long suspected that I was a patriot," murmured Gervis from the end of the table; "now I am convinced of it. You have such a clear way of putting things, Mr. Flemyng."

Mr. Flemyng smiled complacently. "Miss Gervis has not yet answered my question, though," said he.

"First impressions are difficult to state concisely, and are seldom to be trusted when stated," observed Miss Potts in a solemn voice, breaking silence for the first time.

Mr. Flemyng adjusted a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses on his nose, and took a leisurely survey of the speaker. Persons in the position of Miss Potts should not be so ready to obtrude themselves, he thought. After a pause, he nodded at her patronizingly, remarked, "Very true—very true," and then turned to the Princess, who was yawning behind her fan.

"As for you, madame, I fear we shall never succeed in naturalizing you among us. Paris has attractions which we cannot aspire to rival. You mean to desert us in a few days, I am sorry to hear."

"It is very amiable of you to say that you are sorry," replied Varinka. "I, too, am sorry to leave such charming acquaintances; but I have my little cottage at Trouville: as it is there, I am bound to make use of it, you understand."

"To be sure. A most interesting neighbourhood, that of Trouville. Did you ever turn your attention to the subject of geology? I know of no district more rich in fossils than the Norman and Breton coast."

Mr. Flemyng had a good deal to say upon this topic, and said it at considerable length, while the Princess yawned undisguisedly, and occasionally made a grimace, indicative of weariness and despondency, at Geneviève. Four out of the seven people seated round the dinner-table probably found the banquet a very tedious one; but to counterbalance that, the remaining three enjoyed themselves amazingly. Mr. Flemyng was always happy, so long as he was permitted to declaim without interruption; and his daughter and Claud, whose acquaintanceship

had been renewed with satisfaction on both sides, had no objection to the sonorous stream of words, under cover of which they were enabled to exchange their own observations, unheard by others.

"Well, and how have you been amusing yourself since we met last?" was the young lady's first question. "Any more balcony-scenes? I suppose you know that the one subject of conversation hereabouts for the last fortnight has been your spiriting away of Freddy Croft. You have made a friend and an enemy. Lady Croft would go through fire and water for you, and Mrs. Lambert, I believe, has sworn to have your blood. Luckily for you, she herself has suddenly vanished—leaving her bills unpaid, they say. What should you have done if she had brought an action for breach of promise, and called you as witness of a certain interesting episode?"

"You would have been called too," remarked Claud.

"I suppose so. What *should* we have said? Is it very wrong to perjure one's self in a good cause, do you think?"

"Very, I should say. It lays you open to imprisonment, with hard labour, too, which you would not much like."

"I would chance that. At all events, nothing would have induced me to tell the truth."

"Croft is very fortunate to have such a thorough-going partizan at his back."

"Oh, I would do as much as that for anybody. When one has seen a thing which one has no business to see, the least one can do is to behave as though one had not seen it. Not but that I do feel a special interest in Freddy. We are very old friends, he and I. Who is his latest flame? Your sister?"

"Geneviève? Oh, dear no, I don't think so. What could have made you imagine such a thing as that?" asked Claud, in a somewhat displeased tone.

"Don't look so angry. I did not mean to be impertinent; and I know brothers can never believe that it is possible for any one to fall in love with their sisters. I only asked, because Freddy would not be Freddy unless he was profoundly enamoured of somebody; and as there were only two ladies on board your yacht, I believe, I chose the one that seemed to me most likely to attract him. But perhaps he has succumbed to the charms of the governess."

"Perhaps he has. Miss Potts is not exactly beautiful to look upon; but she has all the

virtues. I don't know any one more morally beautiful than she."

"And your sister—is she morally beautiful too? She has a charming face. I wonder whether she would allow me to make friends with her."

Claud said he could not imagine any one refusing Miss Flemyng's friendship.

"And yet, strange as it may appear, such a thing has been known to happen. I can generally hit it off pretty well with any description of man, so long as he is a gentleman; but with girls I am not quite so sure of being successful. Perhaps that is because I like men so much better than women. It doesn't sound well to say so; but it is true, and I always try to tell the truth. In the same way, I never attempt to disguise my feelings towards children—whom I abhor."

"I don't think you really mean that," said Claud.

"Yes, I do, otherwise you may be sure I should not say it; for nothing lowers one's character so much in the eyes of most people as that admission. You, for instance, cannot even bring yourself to believe in such unnatural heartlessness. All the same, I dare say, if the truth were told, you are not very fond of children yourself."

"I suppose you will put me down as an imposter if I say that I am."

"No; I will take your word for it. But most likely you have not had much to do with them. You don't know what it is to have seven small brothers and sisters who set it before themselves as the chief aim of their existence to worry you out of your senses. I don't ill-treat them or box their ears, you know, and they don't dislike me. On the contrary, I believe they are very fond of me; and I have a proper amount of sisterly affection for them as individuals. Collectively, I think they are simply odious. Some day you must bring your sister over to our tumble-down old house for a game of lawn-tennis, which is our one stock amusement; and then your love for children will be put to the test. If you encourage them to overcome their shyness—which you most likely will do, being inexperienced—they will immediately hang themselves about you, like a swarm of bees, and pull your hair, and knock your hat off, and run away with your stick; and the chances are that you will end by losing your temper. I warn you that I have not the smallest control over them; so now you know what you have to expect."

"I think I can promise not to lose my

temper," said Claud, laughing. "Are you the eldest of the family, then?"

"I hold that proud position at home for the present. I have three elder brothers, all in the navy, and all on foreign service. The rest will follow suit, I expect, unless something better turns up. It is the cheapest profession for a young man—or rather the least ruinous. I ought to mention that we are dreadfully badly off; absolute paupers. I dare say you have noticed that people with large families invariably are."

"You don't bear the outward signs of extreme indigence," remarked Claud, with a side-glance at his neighbour's toilette, which indeed was a model of careful finish. "As for comparative poverty, I confess I don't consider that any misfortune at all."

"Oh, don't you? It seems that our tastes differ in more points than one. You like children and straitened means; I like independence and wealth. What a sad pity it is that we cannot change places!"

These last words, happening to coincide with a pause in the general conversation, reached the ears of the philosopher on the other side of the table.

"Ah, the old story!" said he, with the com-

passionate smile of one above ordinary human frailties. "Every one fancies his neighbour's lot a happier one than his own. My dear young people, believe me, if you could make the exchange you wish for, you would find it a very bad bargain, and would soon long to be back in the state of life for which your education and training have fitted you. You remember Horace's Satire, Mr. Gervis—

> "Qui fit, Mæcenas, ut nemo quam sibi sortem
> Seu ratio dederit, seu fors objecerit——"

But Mr. Flemyng was not allowed to finish his quotation; for at this point the Princess rose unceremoniously, and made for the door.

"That man is capable of reciting an entire Latin poem without drawing breath," she whispered to her step-daughter, as she pushed her gently out of the room before her.

CHAPTER VII.

EXIT VARINKA.

The Princess spent a dull and weary evening. While the ladies were alone it was not quite so bad; for Miss Flemyng had a great many questions to ask as to how people were wearing their hair in Paris, and whether short dresses were really coming in again, and so on; and these were subjects upon which one could at least speak with some interest. Moreover, it transpired that the young woman possessed some twenty or thirty yards of real old point d'Alençon, which she wished to dispose of to a friend—being, as she honestly confessed, in sad want of ready money—so that there seemed to be the possibility of a genuine bargain in view. But no sooner had one begun to feel one's way a little, remarking that old lace was entirely out of fashion, but that it might be worth inspecting as a curiosity, than the droning of that in-

supportable old father's voice was heard coming nearer and nearer. Presently it was in the room; and then—*bonsoir!* What idea had he in his head, that solemn, heavy animal, to plant himself directly in front of your chair, and to stun you with his interminable harangues? Why could he not stay in the dining-room, and stupefy himself with port wine, like the other rustics? Did he imagine, by any chance, that it was amusing to hear him talk? Varinka, groaning inwardly, sighed, yawned, and affected inattention; but all was of no avail. Mr. Flemyng had no more compassion upon her than had the Ancient Mariner upon the wedding guest. He had certain observations to make, and he intended to make them: whether his hearer were pleased or not was a detail of comparatively small importance to him.

It was no less a matter than the destiny of the immortal soul that he had brought in with him from the dining-room, and was complacently treating of. In a casual, impartial manner, he cited authorities. Origen and Bishop Butler, Plato and Louis Figuier—a queer medley of writers, ancient and modern, jostled one another in his glib discourse. He had a word of admiration for Socrates and of patronage for St. Paul. So much erudition might well have sur-

prised any one who had not read the last number of the *Bi-Monthly Review*, whence the greater part of these quotations and comments were drawn. Varinka, in spite of herself, was somewhat impressed. Gervis, leaning back in his arm-chair, with his white face resting upon his folded white hands, listened imperturbably, and from time to time suggested some trifling difficulty, which the orator disposed of by a hasty "Yes, yes—exactly so." Claud had slipped away to the billiard-room to smoke a cigarette; and through the open doors could be heard the distant click of the balls which he was knocking about all by himself. Nina Flemyng was sowing the seeds of a friendship with Geneviève in the gloom of the conservatory. Miss Potts, bolt upright in her cane chair, was struggling with sleep, and getting the worst of the contest. "Three or four more evenings like this, and I would take poison," thought the poor Princess.

At length came the welcome sound of wheels upon the gravel. Heaven be praised! they were going then, at last. Miss Flemyng emerged, with somewhat suspicious alacrity, from the conservatory to make her adieux.

"Good-night, madame; so very sorry we are to lose you so soon. I will send up the

lace to-morrow morning for you to look at. Oh, not the slightest trouble in the world. I should like you to see it, because I believe it really *is* good. *Good*-night. Good-night, Mr. Gervis."

It was not to be denied that, for a provincial, the girl had pleasing manners enough.

Claud and Geneviève accompanied their guests into the hall, where many last words of a less formal character were interchanged. A good ten minutes elapsed before the carriage drove away, and Claud could ask his sister's opinion of their new friends.

"I don't know them well enough yet to judge what sort of people they are," she answered.

"But you know whether you like them or not. Miss Flemyng is very anxious to make friends with you."

"So she says. Don't you think she is a little too—too expansive?"

"No, I don't," answered Claud, decisively. "I don't think so at all. I think she is charming; and so will you, when you know her a little better. I hope we shall see a great deal of the Flemyngs this summer. I am going to take you over there on Thursday, you know."

"But I shall be gone before then," said Geneviève.

"I would not quite make up my mind to that, if I were you," Claud remarked, lighting his cigarette, as he stepped out into the porch.

Geneviève followed him, and stood leaning against a pillar overgrown with clematis and Virginia creeper, while she gazed up at the twinkling stars. "My mind is made up for me," she said. "I have only to do as I am told, you know."

"And supposing you were told to remain where you are?"

"I should have to remain, of course," answered Geneviève. "That is the worst of having been born a woman: all one's life long one will have to obey somebody. But I don't know," she added presently, in a tone of suppressed resentment, "why I should be ordered to stay here, where I am not wanted, when Varinka really does want a companion."

"Who says you are not wanted here?" returned Claud. "I want you. The governor wants you."

"Why does he want me?" asked the girl bitterly. "Because he will have no *souffre-douleurs* when Varinka is gone?"

"See here, Gen," said Claud, throwing away the end of his cigarette and drawing a step nearer to his sister; "I wish you would try

to get on a little better with the governor. After all, he is your father."

"Oh, yes, I know that," answered Geneviève quietly. "And he is Varinka's husband."

Claud gave his shoulders an impatient jerk. "Suppose we leave that question alone," he suggested. "It has two sides to it, I dare say, like most questions; and it seems just on the cards that we may not know much about either. I have tried interference, and it has not been a brilliant success. Let them settle it in their own way. At all events, the governor has never done *you* any injury."

Geneviève broke off a spray of clematis, and twisted it between her fingers, without replying.

"And he wishes you to stay in England for a short time and make acquaintance with English people. Surely that is not such a very great thing to ask. Don't you see what a difference it will make, if we have ladies in the house? What could he and I do, if we were all alone here? We could not amuse ourselves, nor entertain our neighbours, nor make a home of the place at all; and the end of it would be that, in a few weeks' time, it would be shut up, and we should begin wandering over the face of the earth again. But if you are here, the

Crofts can come, and—and Miss Flemyng, and lots of people; and you need not be afraid of being dull. There are races, and cricket matches, aud regattas, and no end of things coming off—I was talking it all over with Freddy Croft the other day—it would be quite a new experience for you."

"But Varinka wants me," said Geneviève, wavering.

"H'm!"

"Oh, I know I'm not indispensable to anybody," returned the girl, rather sadly. "It is not that. Only you don't think of Varinka, and of how dull it would be for her to be in Trouville without any companion at all."

"Now, my dear Gen, did you ever know Varinka at a loss for a companion in your life? Do you seriously mean to tell me that she has not fifty bosom friends at Trouville? And if she wants to fill her house with aunts and cousins, won't they swarm round her, like so many flies, at a word? Besides, the governor told me before dinner that he would answer for her consent."

"Naturally. If I told my maid to sit up all night, I would answer for her consent. But she would not like it."

"Well, well; if Varinka isn't a free agent, it

is no use bothering about her, is it? Setting her aside, would you not rather be here than at Trouville?"

And then Geneviève confessed that she would like to see a little more of England before leaving it.

In the meantime, a characteristic dialogue was being carried on in the drawing-room, where Mr. Gervis and his wife had been left to themselves.

"I have a small favour to ask of you," the latter began, rather nervously, as soon as the door had closed behind her guests.

"By a singular coincidence," remarked Mr. Gervis, "I also have a small favour to ask of you. Which of us shall ask first?"

"Oh, you, if you please. I can wait."

Mr. Gervis accordingly stated briefly his wishes with regard to Geneviève, and received full in his face the shower of high-pitched protestations for which he had been prepared.

"But it is unreasonable—simply unreasonable—what you ask of me! If at least you had told me a week or two ago, then I might have found some one to take her place; but now I shall be shut up in my little hut over there, like a squirrel in a cage; for you do not suppose, I imagine, that I shall have the

courage to walk about the *plage* without so much as a dog or a cat of my own to keep me in countenance. Ah, if you knew the tongues of those ladies! I can hear them from here! No; it is impossible!—it is not to be thought of! If it were for the poor child's happiness, I would not say so much; I would try to arrange something. But I know what a cruel disappointment it will be for her; she does not amuse herself any better in this country than I do. For the rest, I have guessed your plan long ago; you are going to marry her to some heavy Englishman or other, who will make her perfectly wretched."

"I assure you," said Gervis, composedly, "that I do not contemplate anything of the kind. I have no desire that she should marry at all for some time to come. Indeed, to tell you the truth, one of my reasons for wishing to detain her here is that I am afraid of your arranging a match for her with a Frenchman—which, as I told you the other day, I could not sanction."

"Do you think I am in a hurry to be more solitary than I am already? When Geneviève marries, I shall have no one in the house with me but servants for nine months out of the twelve."

"Quite so. But with persons of your generous and unselfish temperament one can never feel secure. However, I think you may count upon the young lady's being restored to you unmarried and unengaged before the autumn."

"If you will promise me that—— Still there remains the question of the summer. Certainly I am no longer a very young woman; but I am not yet either old enough or ugly enough to appear at a watering-place without anything in the shape of a companion."

"I quite admit that. Will you have Potts?"

"No," answered the Princess, almost fiercely. "I will not have Miss Potts. I am not fond of being spied upon. Oh, I know more than you think. I know why you suggest Miss Potts."

Gervis, who had been lying back in his chair, slowly raised himself now, and looked his wife steadily in the face. "May I ask what motives you impute to me?" he inquired blandly.

Varinka opened and shut her fan several times, and then turned away, with a short, embarrassed laugh. "It is of no consequence," she answered. "I did not mean to impute anything."

"Oh, I thought you did," said Gervis, sink-

ing back again. "But, as you say, it is of no consequence; and the admirable Potts is not without defects. No doubt you will easily induce one of your relatives to fill her place. And now about the favour you said you had to ask of me. Perhaps I may make so bold as to assume that it is connected with ways and means."

The Princess nodded.

"How much?" asked Gervis laconically.

Varinka hesitated a moment, and then, bending forward, mentioned a sum so large that even Gervis, who prided himself upon never manifesting surprise, could not repress a slight elevation of the eyebrows. He made no remark, however, but got up in his slow, languid way, and crossed the room to a writing-table, at which he seated himself, and began writing a cheque.

Varinka murmured some confused explanations. "Those Paris tradesmen are brigands—if you saw the bills I have had to pay! I was obliged to have the whole appartement painted and papered in the spring. And the new victoria that I told you of—I am convinced that I paid for it twice over; only I could not find the receipt. But all that is nothing. It was my Aunt Sophie who appealed

to me for help. You know, one cannot refuse one's own flesh and blood, and without this advance she would have been simply ruined. Her estates have not brought her in a sou this year. Perhaps before Christmas I may be able to repay you a part——"

Gervis never turned his head. He signed the cheque and blotted it carefully; after which, he rose, and held it out to his wife with a faint smile. "Your Aunt Sophie must be a very extravagant person," he remarked.

Varinka looked at him in silence for a moment. Then, as if prompted by an irrepressible impulse, "You do not believe what I say," she cried.

"Not in the least," answered Gervis, with perfect composure.

The Princess burst into a peal of genuine, unaffected laughter, checking herself abruptly in the midst of it, like a child afraid of being scolded.

"I ought really to apologize for my rudeness," Gervis said. "It must be the insular climate that is brutalizing me already. My only excuse is that you told me, yesterday morning, that that aunt of yours had inherited a second fortune."

"It is true. I had forgotten," answered

Varinka, laughing again. She was not at all offended or ashamed; only a good deal amused at her own stupidity and her husband's odd ways.

"Shall we strike a bargain?" suggested the latter. "We each began by saying we had a favour to ask. You are now in a position to minister to the wants of your Aunt Sophie, or perhaps of a person still nearer and dearer to you. Allow me, on my side, to keep Geneviève for a few weeks, and so to gratify the whim of a person especially dear to me."

"I do not understand. What persons are you speaking of?" asked Varinka, with a troubled look.

"My dear madam, is there any one in the world whom you and I love more than our respective selves?"

"Ourselves?"

"I say, ourselves—not one another, bien entendu. You will be so kind, then, as not to oppose me in this small matter? A thousand thanks. Your protégée shall be restored to you as soon as she finds us intolerable; possibly even sooner."

"And you will promise me that she shall not marry that young man whom you sent on board the yacht with her?"

"Heaven forbid that I should make any promise at all where a woman is concerned! But I will go so far as to say that I cannot conceive anything more improbable."

And with this strong expression of opinion Varinka was fain to be satisfied. After a few minutes she retired for the night, Gervis holding the door open, and bowing ceremoniously, as she rustled past him; but before going to bed, she paid a visit to her step-daughter's room in order to announce that she had changed her plans. She had a queer sort of caricature of a conscience, which may perhaps have suggested to her that some equivalent was due for the cheque which she had thrust into her pocket.

"After all, I am going to leave you in the castle of the ogre," said she cheerfully. "I have been thinking things over, and I have made up my mind not to be selfish. I know you wish to see a little more of England: that is quite natural; and it would not be fair to hurry you away. I said so to him; and he agreed with me. He is not without his redeeming qualities, the ogre. He will not eat you; on the contrary, he will be kind to you, and will let you amuse yourself as much as you please. Only I think you would do well not to scowl at him, when you meet him. No, no;

I will not hear any objections; it is all settled. Amuse yourself well, ma petite, and do not forget your poor Varinka, who will be very solitary without you, all these weeks."

And so the Princess betook herself to her bed, soothed, no doubt, by a comfortable sense of self-approval in that she had done what in her lay towards the promotion of a friendly feeling between the father and daughter. That she had not represented the facts of the case quite correctly is not at all likely to have troubled her. Claud, who took a broad, philosophical view of human nature, used often to say that Varinka was physically incapable of telling the truth, and that it would be as unreasonable to quarrel with her for lying as to blame a blind man for running up against you in the street.

Just before the departure of the up-express, two days later, the station-master, the three porters, and the knot of loungers who are generally to be seen congregated round the bookstall at the Beachborough station during the summer months, were privileged to behold a really touching scene. A lady of diminutive stature, dressed in the neatest of grey travelling-costumes, was standing beside the door of the compartment reserved for her, alternately press-

ing her handkerchief to her eyes and raising herself on tiptoe to embrace a tall, dark-haired girl, whose features seemed to express mingled sorrow and remorse. A young gentleman of considerable personal attractions, a footman bearing rugs and umbrellas, and a lady's-maid with a dressing-case, held themselves a few paces aloof, as if unwilling to intrude upon this painful leavetaking. Not until the bell had rung, and all the other passengers were in their places, could the two ladies be induced to let one another go. The guard, respectfully addressing the elder of them as "Yer 'ighness," was compelled to inform her twice that she was keeping everybody waiting, and finally to have recourse to a gentle movement of compulsion, before he could sound his whistle, and start the train.

The emotions of the great seldom fail to obtain interest and sympathy, and, even before the station-master had disclosed the rank of the illustrious traveller, it was felt to be highly creditable to the occupant of a reserved compartment that she should weep like any common person.

"The Princess of Youramuff in Germany," said the obsequious official, in answer to several inquiries. "Married to Mr. Gervis, of South-

lands. Her 'ighness proceeds to Dover to-day, *ong route* for the continent. Please to stand o' one side for a moment, ma'am, and allow the young lady to pass."

The great Lord Courtney himself could hardly have commanded more reverence than did Geneviève, as, with downcast eyes, she passed out to her carriage. For how can we simple Lynshire folks be expected to know that there exist nations so inconsequent as to designate the least important among their nobility by the proud title of prince?

Geneviève was much ashamed of herself. She had allowed Varinka to depart far too easily, she thought; she had been too much influenced by her own desire to remain on for a few weeks in England—a desire for which, now that she came to reflect upon it, she could discover no warrant at all.

"I wish I had insisted upon going with her," she exclaimed aloud, at last, as a picture of the deserted one pacing sadly along the Trouville sands rose before her mental vision.

"How could you, when she insisted upon going without you?" asked Claud, looking down from the driving-seat of the mail-phaeton which he was piloting, with more dash than caution, through the back streets of Beach-

borough. "At all events," he added, "she is off now, and we can't very well pursue her; so the best thing you can do is to try and enjoy yourself. It would be most ungrateful to allow poor Varinka's feelings to be lacerated in this distressing way for nothing—don't you see? Let us make an effort."

Geneviève smiled, conscious that it was only by an effort that she was able to refrain from enjoying herself already. Was not the mere fact of being whirled through the summer air at a speed of twelve miles an hour enough to raise any one's spirits? The pleasant, prosperous English landscape, with its trim hedgerows, its fields of wheat and barley bending under the breeze, its bright green foregrounds and hazy blue distances; the chorus of birds twittering in every tree and bush; the cattle standing up to their knees in shady pools; the fragrance of honeysuckle-wreaths in deep lanes —all these moved with a new and soft delight the senses of a city-bred maiden; and if she did not fully share her brother's anticipations of pleasure at the prospect of lawn-tennis in Miss Flemyng's company, her cry of admiration was not less genuine than his, when a turn of the road brought them in sight of the old red house in which that hospitable young lady's childhood and youth had been passed.

"What a lovely place!" she exclaimed. "There can be nothing like that out of England."

"It is a beautiful old house," said Claud. "Picturesque, romantic-looking; but quite homely, all the same. The sort of house that could only be inhabited by people of a certain refinement. Just the sort of house which I should have imagined Miss Flemyng living in."

"Should you really?" Geneviève said, her enthusiasm cooling a little. "That only shows what different impressions the same person may make upon different people. I should have connected her with a bright, white Italian villa, full of mirrors and handsome furniture and bric-a-brac."

"Why?" asked Claud, surprised.

And the only reply that Geneviève could make was, "I don't know why; but I should."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE MOATED HOUSE.

If the Moated House was specially adapted for the honour of sheltering the Flemyng family, it had waited many years and passed through many hands before falling to its rightful tenants. Lynshire, taken as a whole, is not a county given to changes. We speak with a certain contempt in our parts of those neighbourhoods nearer London where properties are constantly being let or sold, and are accustomed to boast that from time immemorial there has been a Croft at Croft Manor, a Knowles at Stone Hall, a Pilkington at Somerley, and so on, through a respectable list of country gentlemen, great and small. But there are some houses which, for no apparent reason, seem destined to vicissitudes, and the Moated House has been one of these. Tradition has it that, from the day of its foundation, it has never seen two generations of owners bearing the same

name; and it is certain that, during the last two hundred years (which should be about the age of the house as it now stands), it has harboured half a dozen different families, all of whom have left their mark upon it in one way or another, but have failed to take root within its walls. It occupies the site of a fine old feudal castle; but nothing now remains to recall this ancient structure, save a ruined keep, and the dried-up moat which gives its name to the present building; while, as for the broad lands that lay about it, they have dropped gradually away, with the constant change of proprietors, and are now only a memory. I myself can just remember Mr. Flemyng's purchase of the estate, which at that time had shrunk to the house and the park, comprising some forty acres of land in all. People said he got the place cheap; and so perhaps he did, if value may be measured by an æsthetic standard; for the park, though small, boasts of as fine elms and limes as are to be seen anywhere in the country, and the old gabled house itself is well placed upon a slight elevation, the circle of its moat clearly defined around it, and its rich red-brick wall, partly hidden by ivy and climbing roses and jasmine, rising from amidst a blaze of flowers.

These flowers are Mr. Flemyng's especial hobby. Horticulture—so some people say—is the only one of his numerous whims upon which he has brought knowledge, as well as self-confidence, to bear; he has devoted infinite pains, and also, probably, more money than he could easily afford, to the gratifying of it; and the result has been an undeniable success. Old Colonel Gervis, of Southlands, who rode the same hobby upon a far more extensive and expensive scale, always admitted, I believe, that his garden was no match for his neighbour's. The lay of the land was less favourable to him. With greater space at command, he could not produce the effect of the gorgeous masses of colour which surrounded the Moated House; nor has Southlands any such turf to show as that on which—the fulness of time being come—a lawn-tennis court had now been marked out, and which was unhappily beginning to be worn bare in certain places by the feet of the servers.

At the sound of carriage-wheels thundering on the wooden bridge which spans the moat, four little rough-headed boys came running out from behind a clump of evergreens, and stopped short, in various attitudes indicating distrust, on finding themselves face to face with a strange

lady and gentleman. Claud, by way of opening the acquaintance in a playful manner, shook his whip at them; whereupon the eldest, a stolid urchin of ten or thereabouts, promptly picked up a large clod of earth from one of the adjacent flower-beds. He did not proceed to launch this missile, but merely held it in his hand in obvious readiness for possible emergencies, while his younger brothers grouped themselves behind him. Claud laughed, and the phalanx of young gentlemen responded by a unanimous frown. Relations between the parties were showing symptoms of becoming a trifle strained, when Miss Flemyng, looking very pretty in a perfectly fitting costume of white flannel, appeared upon the scene, and dispersed the small fry with a backward sweep of her sunshade.

"Go away, all of you," she cried. "Go quite away, and don't let yourselves be seen again till tea-time. How very kind of you to come, Miss Gervis! This is not a formal visit, is it? You don't want to be received in the drawing-room? Then we will go and sit under the cedar tree, and they can bring us out tea presently. I asked some people to make up a game of lawn-tennis this afternoon; but they can't come. I am so sorry."

"Don't be sorry on my account," said Geneviève. "I could not have played. I have never even seen the game yet."

"Oh, you would soon learn. All you have to do is to hit the ball over the net, you know. I would give you a lesson, if you liked; only perhaps you would find it rather too hot for a single game. I don't know what it is to be too hot myself."

Indeed she looked as if she could never be over-heated, or flushed, or dishevelled. Geneviève, scanning her with a Frenchwoman's eye for details, noticed the absolute accuracy and finish of her costume. From crown to sole there was nothing wanting, nothing awry. Her complexion, which was that of the fairest of brunettes, had the clear glow of perfect health; her movements had the grace and freedom which only constant exercise can bestow. Geneviève remembered that Freddy Croft had once described Miss Flemyng as looking like a thoroughbred in tip-top condition, and she was struck now with the aptness of the comparison, which at the time had seemed to her a trifle coarse, as applied to a lady.

The two girls seated themselves under a spreading cedar-tree. There were wicker-chairs, comfortably cushioned, waiting for them

there; a hammock was slung between two overarching boughs; some newspapers and a novel lay upon the grass. Looking out from that deep, cool shade, the eye rested contentedly upon brilliant masses of geraniums and petunias and zinnias, upon butterflies hovering over them in the bright sunshine, and upon the old red house, with its mantle of creepers, beyond.

"How lovely it all is!" exclaimed Geneviève. "You must be very happy, living in such a beautiful place."

"It is well enough in summer," answered the other; "but even then it is not always fine weather in this country, unfortunately. Still there are worse places than this to lie down and dream in on hot afternoons. I am glad you like it; because perhaps you will often be tempted to come and see me now."

Evidently Miss Flemyng intended to be very friendly. Geneviève exerted herself to respond, wondering a little within herself, the while, why it was that she should find responsiveness an exertion.

Presently the youngest of the small boys who had been so summarily dismissed a quarter of an hour before came toddling across the lawn, and planted himself in front of his sister, with

his blue eyes and his rosy mouth very wide open. News of importance seemed to be struggling vainly for utterance through his lips, and heralded its advent by sundry abortive gasps.

"Well, Tommy," said Miss Flemyng, "what is the matter now?"

"Oh, Nina, Jacky *is* such a naughty boy!"

"Well, my dear child, I can't help it. So are you a naughty boy, as far as that goes. You ought not to tell tales."

"But, Nina, he's putting a side-saddle on one of the cows, and he's going to ride her round the orchard, he says."

"I think I can trust the cow to put a stop to that little plan."

"But, Nina, he's got your new habit on, and he's——"

"Wretched child! why could you not have told me that sooner? Run off as fast as you can, and tell Jack that, if he doesn't take that habit off instantly and carry it up to my room, he will be put to bed at six o'clock for a fortnight. But of course he won't listen to you. Miss Gervis, will you excuse me for a few minutes? I am afraid I must go and see after these terrible children myself."

"Shall I go?" suggested Claud, rising from the low chair in which he had been seated.

"I will undertake to reduce your rebels to order in a very few minutes, and it will be a great pleasure to me to save you a walk in this broiling sun."

"Oh, would you? How more than good of you! Some day I will do as much for you perhaps. But you must be prepared for all kinds of indignities. I warn you that these children are known far and wide for their utter want of manners and reverence."

"I am not afraid," answered Claud, laughing. "Come along, Tommy, and show me the way."

Geneviève could not help noticing the change that had taken place in Miss Flemyng's demeanour and intonation during the above short colloquy. Her manner had been friendly from the first—now it was something more; though in what the change consisted it was not so easy to specify. Upon more mature acquaintance with her new friend, Geneviève learnt to look for this undefinable transformation whenever Miss Flemyng had occasion to speak to a man. She discovered, in short, that the young lady had one voice at the service of her own sex, and another at that of the opposite. The phenomenon is hardly a very remarkable one in itself, nor can it be said to be in any way the peculiar attribute of Miss Flemyng; but upon

the present occasion it was rendered somewhat specially noticeable owing to the fact that, up to the moment of Claud's good-natured offer, she had not seen fit to address him at all. It is possible that this neglect may not have been wholly unintentional. It is possible, also—for she was well versed in the manners and moods of men—that Miss Flemyng may have expected the young fellow to be a little huffed by so protracted a disregard of his presence. But if she had formed any such anticipation, her prescience was at fault. Claud was neither shy nor vain, and his temperament disposed him towards a quiet contemplation of all pleasing objects. He had been perfectly contented to sit in the shade, and watch his pretty hostess, and would have been contented so to sit for another half-hour or more, if circumstances had not brought about an interruption. He admired Miss Flemyng excessively. He was not in love with her ; but perhaps he was going to be. The possibility had just suggested itself to him —nothing more—and, so far as it had gone, the sensation was a sufficiently agreeable one. It stimulated interest without disturbing the mental balance, and was as yet far too vague to demand self-examination.

When, after a tolerably long interval, he re-

turned with the four little boys hanging about different parts of his person, he found the two ladies seated beside a low table, on which stood a tea-tray and cups, and some dishes of piled-up fruit. Miss Flemyng turned round with a laugh and a shrug of her shoulders, as she looked at his escort.

"I told you how it would be," said she. "In spite of my warnings, you have chosen to make friends with those unprincipled children, and now there will be no more peace for you in this house."

"But I like it," said Claud.

She shrugged her shoulders again. "Every one to his taste! And what about my riding-habit, if you please?"

"I am happy to be able to announce to you that it is uninjured. An indignant young woman, whom I presumed to be your maid, was carrying it off triumphantly when I arrived upon the scene. But Jack tells me that the whole scheme would have had to be abandoned in any case, owing, as you anticipated, to insuperable objections on the part of the cow."

The boys had grouped themselves round Geneviève now, and one of them had already possessed himself of her parasol.

"Are you, too, fond of children, Miss Gervis?'

Nina inquired. And this time it was Claud who detected that slight alteration of accent.

"When they are good," answered Geneviève judiciously.

"Gen can always make them good," Claud remarked. "It is her speciality."

He had picked up a tennis-racquet from the grass, and was making cuts at imaginary balls.

"Are you a great hand at this game?" he asked of his neighbour.

"Well—I am middling. I can hold my own with any woman I have ever met. What are you like yourself?"

"Oh, I am bad. I never practise."

"Then we will have a match for a pair of gloves some day."

"I wish you would have it now," said Geneviève. "I should like so much to see you play." And then, as Miss Flemyng hesitated a little, "Please don't think of standing on ceremony with me," she added; "the children will entertain me, if I want any other entertainment than looking on."

Nina waited for no further persuasion. Perhaps she felt that she had already done her best to amuse her visitor, and could do little more, so far as conversation went.

If Geneviève did not enjoy watching Miss

Flemyng playing lawn-tennis, it can only have been because she lacked artistic education. No eye trained to appreciate loveliness of line and contour could have failed to derive supreme satisfaction from the sight of that lissom figure thrown by the return of the flying ball into a hundred different postures, each a study for a sculptor and all as natural as the movements of a savage. Perhaps the fact that this young female athlete had nothing rustic about her, but was arrayed in accordance with the latest decrees of fashion, may have added a charm to the exhibition. Claud was enchanted;—so much so that he allowed his opponent to win the first game with ridiculous ease. Then he began to exert himself a little more. With his superiority of reach and his knowledge of racquets, he ought, he imagined, to have little difficulty in winning the match, if so minded. Miss Flemyng's play improved, however, in equal measure with his own, and the second game was added to her score. The next three went the same way. Do what he would, Claud could not put the ball away from his active little adversary; and the annoying part of it was that, whereas he was becoming very hot and rather short of breath, she was taking it all as coolly as you please, scarcely running at all,

and seeming to know by instinct where the ball would pitch. At last, when she had scored the final ace of the sixth game by a brilliant back-handed half-volley, Claud threw down his racquet with a gesture of despair.

"That will do," he said. "I am not going to make myself ridiculous any longer. And I will not venture to play with you again till I have taken some lessons. Why didn't you tell me you were a professional? If you would at least confess that you are tired, it would soothe my wounded vanity a little."

"I am not a bit tired," answered Miss Flemyng. "We will play the rubber out, if you like."

"Heaven forbid! I don't in the least mind admitting that *I* am tired; and I want to sit in the shade, and rest."

"Well, perhaps it would be pleasanter," said Miss Flemyng. "What has become of your sister?"

"She has gone off somewhere with the children. I saw them leading her away captive some time ago. You need not feel anxious about her; she is sure to be perfectly happy with them."

"Do you think so?"

Nina was lying back, half in, half out of the

net hammock, one little foot swinging lazily to and fro an inch or two above the ground. She had placed her right hand under her head, and was staring up at the spaces of blue sky that showed between the cedar branches, while with her left she lifted a cherry, every now and again, and let it drop into her mouth. "I was quite right about her," she remarked, after a pause.

"How?"

"I told you the other day, you know, that probably she would not like me. And she doesn't."

"What makes you think that? I am sure you are wrong. Gen is not demonstrative; she takes a long time to make up her mind about people——"

"She has made up her mind about me. And it is a pity; because I like her immensely. She is my ideal of a woman. The kind of woman whom I should adore, if I were a man. She has a beautiful face, do you know. Not beautiful in the way of features; but one can see that there is a soul behind it. I am convinced that she has a soul; and that is what interests me. I myself have no soul at all. I have a heart—more or less of one—but absolutely no soul. I haven't really."

All this was said half absently, in brief sentences, with a pause between each ; and the general effect was rather that of a soliloquy than of a tribute to conversation.

Claud said nothing. He was absorbed in contemplation of the picture before him, and for the moment it seemed a matter of no importance at all whether the utterances that fell from those perfect lips were nonsense or not. Presently Nina resumed :—

" The worst of making friends with women is that one has to waste so much time over it. Life is too short for all that preliminary humbug ; and they won't let you off a syllable of it. Of course, if one sees a prospect of friendship beyond, one wades on with as good a grace as one can ; but if one does not, it is best to give the whole thing up ; don't you think so ? I am afraid I shall have to give your sister up."

" I hope you won't," said Claud.

" Oh, I only mean in a certain sense. Now with men, if they are at all decent sort of people, there is no trouble of that kind. I always feel that I can safely say to them, ' We get on well together ; some day we shall probably be friends. Suppose we skip the introductory chapters, and assume that we have known one another for years. Won't that save

both of us a great deal of unnecessary boredom ? ' "

" And do they generally agree ? "

" Nine out of ten of them do most cordially, and begin telling me their secrets at once. A man is always dying to talk about himself."

" And the tenth ? "

" The tenth is generally an unbearable prig. I do trust you don't say that because you intend to be the exception yourself."

" I don't know," said Claud. " I am afraid I have no secrets to tell."

" Well, but you have ambitions, ideas, an object in life—something."

" Perhaps ; but all those things would not interest you ? "

" Of course they would interest me. They are the very things that do interest me. Please begin."

" I would so very much rather hear you talk about yourself."

" I *have* been talking about myself, haven't I ? I have been endeavouring to give you an insight into my character."

" But you have said nothing about your own ambitions, and object in life, and so forth."

" I have no ambitions that I know of, except

the ambition that everybody has to get hold of money somehow or other. My chief object in life is to get as much amusement out of it as I can. Now are you satisfied?"

"Not at all," answered Claud. "If you will pardon my saying so, I don't believe you have described yourself quite truly."

"I assure you I have. There is no use in trying to represent oneself as better than one is, because one is certain to be found out sooner or later. I am good-natured, because I was born so; but I don't feel the smallest vocation to benefit my species. I should never go out of my way to do any good to anybody, and I should certainly make myself very disagreeable to anybody who interfered with my tastes."

"Might one make so bold as to ask what your tastes are?"

"Certainly. I like hunting, and I like dancing, and I like plenty of new clothes; and there is another thing that I like better than all; only, if I call it by its true name, I shall shock you."

"Never mind. I should like to hear it truthfully described."

"Flirting, then. Now you are shocked. You are more than shocked; you are scandalized. You are saying to yourself that I am a very vulgar girl."

"No one could by any possibility say that of you, Miss Flemyng."

"Ah, you are less truthful than I am, I see. And the amusing thing is that there never lived a woman yet, good or bad, who did not enjoy flirting. Still, one ought not to set people's nerves on edge by calling a spade a spade. I knew I should shock you."

"But really, Miss Flemyng, I am not so easily shocked as you think."

"And really, Mr. Gervis, I don't care a—a cherry-stone whether you are shocked or not."

Claud laughed. "Do you know," said he, "I suspect that if we go on talking in this way much longer, we shall begin to fight."

Nina slid down from the hammock on to her feet, stretched herself, yawned, and rubbed her eyes with the backs of her hands; and never was an ungainly attitude assumed with more exquisite grace.

"I believe the sun has been getting into my brains and making me silly," she remarked. "Or is it the effect of your company, do you think? Anyhow, we have got to know one another better by my talking a little nonsense, and the next time we meet, it will be your turn. Here comes your sister, accompanied by a dismounted cavalier, leading his horse."

And something in this spectacle apparently tickled Miss Flemyng's sense of the ludicrous, for her shoulders shook with silent laughter.

"It is only Freddy Croft," said Claud, raising himself upon his elbow, and following the direction of her glance. "Why do you laugh?"

But Nina returned no answer; unless a slight increase of merriment could be taken as such. She had not yet recovered herself when the approaching couple came within speaking distance; and Freddy's expressive features immediately put on a sympathetic grin. He had ridden over to Southlands, it appeared, bearing a note of invitation, and, in consequence of information received there, had taken the Moated House on his way back.

"I say, Gervis, you are all coming over to stay with us next week," he announced. "We must introduce your sister to the noble game of cricket; and Mr. Gervis will meet lots of people who knew him before the flood."

"The governor!—is he coming too?" ejaculated Claud, looking rather taken aback.

"I should just think he was. I saw him over at your place just now, and I told him there would be some other old boys for him to walk about with and talk to, and that sort of

thing; so he said that would do him down to the ground. If only the weather holds up, we'll have a regular jolly week. Miss Flemyng is coming, of course."

"Not unless she is asked," put in that young lady quietly.

"Asked! Why, my mother asked you weeks ago."

"Did she? I had forgotten all about it."

For some reason or other, Nina had suddenly become grave and subdued. After this, she addressed her conversation exclusively to Geneviève, and bade Claud good-bye, when the time came, in an absent, perfunctory manner, as if she were hardly aware of his existence.

He thought a good deal about her on the way home; but did not communicate the subject of his thoughts to his sister. He was fascinated and a little puzzled, but upon the whole not quite so well pleased as he had expected to be. Perhaps, after all, there was, as she herself had hinted, a tinge of vulgarity in her affectation of excessive plain-speaking; and, all things considered, the only decided sentiment with regard to Miss Flemyng that he could as yet find in his heart was a profound admiration for her physical charms. So much the better for his peace of mind, thought he.

CHAPTER IX.

AT CROFT MANOR.

Croft Manor has ever borne a social character singularly out of keeping with the solid, stolid respectability of its exterior. To look at the house standing, huge, square and uncompromising, in the midst of its wide park, without a flower-bed near it, and with the extensive stabling of the establishment unconcealed by any screen of trees or shrubs, you would have set it down as the home of a line of wealthy squires addicted, probably, to farming and field sports, attending church regularly on Sunday mornings and going to bed every night at half-past ten. But in truth Croft has never owned any such worthy lords as these. Its masters have been for the most part a roystering lot of rakes and spendthrifts, with here and there, if report speaks truly, a rogue among them.

Not to go so far back as the brawling, dicing baronets of the last century, it is within my own recollection that people used to shake their heads when Sir Montagu Croft's name was mentioned, and that there were doings at the Manor, in his time, which Hicks, my grandmother's butler, used to speak of with suppressed glee as "the dooce's own delight," but as to the precise nature of which he declined to satisfy my youthful curiosity. Later in life, when my interest in this awful and wicked personage was no longer so keen, I of course heard all about him. He seems to have had a fine capacity for every form of vice, with a preference for those which entail the largest expenditure of cash; and no doubt he would have gone straight to the dogs, dragging his property after him, had he not very considerately broken his neck one day shortly after the birth of his heir. But for this accident our friend Freddy would hardly have found himself in his present comfortable circumstances when, after a long minority, he entered upon his inheritance.

Since that day the Manor, which had been closed for many years, and for many more inhabited chiefly by Lady Croft's sober old friends, has, it must be confessed, regained something

of its former notoriety. It has once more come to be known as a "fast" house, though with the modified signification attached to that word in these more healthy times. A man may stay there nowadays without fear of being expected to dispose of three bottles of port at a sitting, or to stake all his worldly goods upon a cast of the dice; but, on the other hand, he must be prepared to swallow more champagne and brandy-and-soda than he wants; he must not object to play poker or Napoleon half the night through, nor must he be surprised if he is dragged out of bed in the small hours of the morning and forcibly tossed in a blanket by half-a-dozen of his light-hearted companions. Those who do not find these pastimes attractive are best away from Croft Manor; and that there are a good many such persons is sufficiently evidenced by the fact that its rooms are rarely tenanted, save by members of a certain set. Quiet, nervous and irritable men, give the place a wide berth; and those who, for the sake of their long-standing friendship with Lady Croft, consent to visit her occasionally, as of old, usually find some excuse for cutting their stay short —thereby greatly surprising their genial host, who cannot at all understand why they should

be in such a hurry to be off, when he and his friends have taken so much trouble to make the house lively and agreeable for them.

To do Freddy justice, it is not in his nature to willingly hurt or offend anybody; and if he were left to himself, his pranks would be reserved for his own intimates. It was not he who put a couple of live frogs into poor Miss Pennefather's boots; it was not he who took advantage of the drowsiness which sometimes affects a gentleman who shall be nameless to brutally singe that gentleman's hair and beard; nor was it he, again, who, when the Croft fire-engine was being exhibited to the lord-lieutenant of the county, caused the hose to be pointed full at that venerable nobleman's upturned face—an offence, by the way, which his lordship has never pardoned, and never will pardon. He got the credit of these and numberless other escapades of which the talented originator was Lord Lynchester; and the truth is that when that ornament to the peerage enters a house, the sooner all decent people escape from it the better for them. I speak without bitterness of feeling, and I am not, I hope, vindictive; but if ever one of Lord Lynchester's merry jests should prove the means of bringing him within reach of the

arm of the law, I know who will be there to have a look at him in the dock.

He is not, I believe, very fond of staying in other people's houses, and Croft Manor, as a general thing, sees him only once a year; but on that occasion—during the week, namely, which of late years has been devoted to the decision of a series of county cricket-matches on Freddy's ground—he seldom fails to keep his engagement; for he has an erroneous notion that he can play the game.

Our friends from Southlands arrived on the evening of the day for which they had been invited, and entered the drawing-room, before dinner, simultaneously with Lord Lynchester, who had been cricketing all day, and having failed to score in his first innings, was in an exceedingly bad temper. Lady Croft, who had not yet had an opportunity of shaking hands with her son's guest, and who was mortally afraid of the man, rose to welcome him with her nervous company smile.

"So glad you were able to come. So sorry Lady Lynchester could not come with you. Where is she now?"

"Haven't the ghost of an idea," answered his lordship curtly, and whisking round, presented his hostess with a fine view of his

back. He stood, with his hands in his pockets, swaying slowly from his heels to his toes, and surveying the assembled company with a steady frown. He was a tall, thin man, with a small head well set on his shoulders, black hair turning grey at the temples and a slight waxed moustache. It was a handsome face, but an eminently disagreeable one, and no one could wonder that Lady Lynchester should flee from before it whenever she got the chance.

There were some thirty people sitting and standing in different parts of the long room, of whom it was easy to see that at least two-thirds had been invited by the master of the house, and the remainder by his mother. The latter, a dignified little coterie of grey-headed ladies and gentlemen, were gathered together in the neighbourhood of Lady Croft's armchair, which from long-established custom stood at all seasons close to the fireside, while the younger and livelier guests were assembled near the distant bay-window in which Miss Croft's tall figure was a prominent object. The two divisions appeared to have formed themselves instinctively into separate camps, as if in mute protest against the possibility of crabbed age and youth dwelling together. Midway in the intervening space sat Nina Flemyng, stroking the head

of a shaggy deerhound, and conversing in an undertone with a six-foot admirer, who was bending uncomfortably over her. There were only eight ladies present, all told.

Geneviève took note of these and other details from the corner in which she had modestly established herself, while her father was listening to Lady Croft's plaintive murmurings with that odd, unfathomable air of his, in which courtesy, deference and weariness all had a part, and which sometimes gave him a fugitive resemblance to the late Emperor of the French. She was wondering where Freddy could have concealed himself when the subject of her speculations bustled in, his face red and shining from the combined effects of sun and cold water, his smoothly-brushed hair still damp, and his fingers struggling with a refractory sleeve-link, which had evidently been thrust into its place on his way downstairs. Freddy has often been heard to boast that he can dress for dinner in a trifle under the five minutes. A hasty glance round the room revealed to him Geneviève's whereabouts, and she was immediately saluted by one of those numbing grips of the hand which are the Englishman's equivalent for a whole page of fine phrases.

"Well, Miss Gervis, so you've found your

way here all right, eh? Hideous old shop, ain't it? But there's plenty of room in it, that's one thing, and it grows upon you, I think. I hope you'll find it do so. I say, where's my friend Miss Potts?"

"She was not invited," answered Geneviève, smiling.

"Bless me! How awfully stupid! I'll tell my mother to write a line to-night, and ask her to come over to-morrow."

"Oh, no, you must not do that," Geneviève said. "She would not care to come, and perhaps—" Here she glanced for a moment at Mr. Gervis, and left her sentence unfinished. "But it is very kind of you to have thought of her," she resumed, "and she will be pleased when I tell her."

"Why kind? I wanted to see her," Freddy said simply. "Miss Potts and I always got on together first-rate. We will talk it over afterwards. I must go and look after some of these people now; I'm afraid I'm awfully late."

Freddy hurried away to attend to his duties as host, and soon returned, bringing with him a stout, middle-aged gentleman, whom he introduced to Geneviève as Colonel Finch, remarking at the same time, in a perfectly audible aside, that he was a cheery old chap, who would

keep her amused all through dinner, and talk nineteen to the dozen.

"I will do my best to deserve my character, Miss Gervis," Colonel Finch remarked, not at all disconcerted, as he led his partner towards the dining-room, and indeed Geneviève found him a sufficiently entertaining neighbour.

"This is the first time you have stayed here, I suppose," he began. "Yes. Queer house—very queer house—yes. The kindest-hearted people that ever breathed; let you do exactly as you like, and do anything for you; but noisy, uncommonly noisy. Bear-fighting, you know, and practical jokes, and all that sort of thing—yes. Know Miss Croft at all? H'm! Last time I was here, she came into the smoking-room, with a big cigar in her mouth, after the others had gone to bed, sat up till morning, playing loo with some of the young fellows, and finished up by backing herself to jump over a chair standing. Did it too. You don't smoke, eh? Glad to hear it. Between you and me, I think ladies are a little bit out of place in a smoking-room—what? I'm getting old, you see—too old for this house. Fact is, I shouldn't have come here at all, if I had known I was going to meet Lynchester. Nasty-tempered fellow, that. Doesn't mind how far he goes

with other people, and won't stand much retaliation. Chances are they will have some deuced unpleasant row with him one of these days—yes. Oh, he looks quiet enough now; but that's because he is sitting between two old ladies, and he's in the sulks too, they tell me. Later in the evening, you'll see—or rather, I hope you won't see. Dare say you'll hear, though—what?"

The worthy colonel continued in this strain, without intermission, *ab ovo usque ad mala*, saving Geneviève all trouble in the way of searching for subjects of conversation, and giving her a good deal of information as to the characters and habits of the neighbourhood in short, disjointed sentences, each of which was punctuated by a muttered "Yes" or a "What?" He was fond of talking, and his hearer had a preference for listening; so that they suited each other as well as Jack Sprat and his wife are said to have done, and parted with mutual regret when Lady Croft gave the signal for the ladies to move.

Geneviève, for her part, longed to have her loquacious old friend back when she found herself in the drawing-room, seated beside an equally talkative, but infinitely less agreeable lady, who cross-questioned her as to the history

of her past life, and asked her point-blank why her father and his wife lived apart. But this martyrdom, which Geneviève, in her ignorance of British customs, had feared might be prolonged for hours, did not last quite twenty minutes; at the expiration of which time the appearance of a few black coats in the doorway brought release to more than one sufferer. It was only a small body of men who showed themselves. The remainder, it appeared, were getting up a pool in the billiard-room, whither some of the ladies, among whom were Miss Croft and Nina Flemyng, presently went down to join them.

Almost immediately afterwards, Geneviève was startled by a slight movement behind her, and turning round, discovered Freddy standing grinning at her elbow.

"Don't be alarmed," said he; "it's only me. I just waited to see half of those people downstairs started at a round game and the other half at pool, and then I nipped off, and came in through that door at the other end of the room. Now we have got rid of the lot of them, thank goodness! and we'll have some music, if you don't mind, by-and-by. You haven't been so cruel as to leave the violin behind you, as well as Miss Potts, I hope."

"Oh, but indeed I have," answered Geneviève. "Most likely your friends would have thought me very cruel if I had brought it."

Freddy groaned. "Well, really this is too bad! Do you know, I have been looking forward to this moment ever since I got up this morning, and all day long I have been wondering how I should manage to get you up here away from those fellows, and whether perhaps you wouldn't want to play pool, or something; and now that I've worked it all so beautifully——"

"You find that you are reduced to having to talk to me, instead of hearing me play the violin. I am very sorry. Can't you go downstairs again?"

"Now, Miss Gervis, you know I didn't mean that," exclaimed Freddy, calling up into his blue eyes an expression intended to convey mild reproach and a great many other things less easily indicated. "You know there is nothing in all the world that I would rather do than talk to you."

This was our young friend's method of paying his addresses. Like everything else that he put his hand to, he did it thoroughly. "Only, you see," he went on, after a pause, "I always think of you with your violin, some-

how: it seems like a part of you. I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll send a trap over to Southlands to-morrow morning, and it shall bring back Miss Potts and the violin together."

Geneviève did not answer for a moment. When she did, there was a certain soft vibration in her voice which Freddy had never detected there before.

"Thank you very much indeed," she said; "but I am afraid Miss Potts could not come. I should have to ask permission for her; and I—I would rather not do that. But you have no idea how pleased she will be when she hears that you wanted her. It is so very seldom that any one shows her the smallest attention; though there are plenty of people who make use of her when it suits them. I don't think I ever met any one so kind as you are."

Freddy stared in sheer amazement, while his heart—which, to be sure, was a very soft one—became filled with a sort of indignant pity. All this gratitude for a simple piece of careless good nature! What could the poor girl's life have been? Among what monsters of selfishness could she have lived, that she should be so touched by such a trifle? He looked across the room at Mr. Gervis, who was reclining placidly in an armchair beside a hook-nosed dowager,

with a strong desire to seize that frail, delicate-looking old gentleman by the shoulders and ask him what the devil he meant by it. He did not understand—how should he, when the girl hardly suspected as much herself?—that her training had taught her to look for a motive beneath every apparent act of kindness; nor had he discovered that her temperament was of that rather morbid description which submits more willingly to actual ill-treatment than to indifferent toleration, and is apt to be more moved by some chance evidence of disinterestedness than by years of steady, matter-of-course affection. Remembering, after a little further cogitation, what a real good fellow Claud was—all Freddy's friends and the greater part of his acquaintances were real good fellows—and that the father, likewise, was a civil-spoken old party, he came to the conclusion that Miss Gervis's sensibility could hardly, after all, be attributable to unhappiness at home, and must probably arise out of an exaggerated tenderness for the absent Potts. "Case of love me, love my dog," he thought; and straightway there arose in his imagination a vision of Miss Potts spending her declining years in peace and plenty at Croft Manor, treated as an old and valued friend by the lord

thereof and his wife, and adored by their children, whom of course she would spoil abominably. It will be perceived that, in this instance at any rate, Freddy's love was not of that heedless kind which revels only in the joy of the passing moment, and takes no thought of eventualities.

At the same time, he did not flatter himself that the prize would be his whenever he pleased, and for the mere asking. He was a modest little fellow enough, and believing Geneviève to be immeasurably his superior, was prepared to give proof of infinite patience and devotion before he could hope that his love might be in any degree returned. And yet it is probable that he would have been the least bit in the world mortified if he could have read Miss Gervis's heart when he wished her good-night, after a *tête-à-tête* of nearly two hours, and could have seen how little suspicion there was there of the tender sentiments which were agitating his own. Once, indeed, when Varinka's anxious suspicions had suggested that the young Englishman might have fallen in love with her, the notion, absurd as it was, had caused Geneviève a momentary vague tremor, in which, if she had analysed it, she would have found that gratification had some small part; but this

had been nothing more than a passing emotion, forgotten almost as soon as felt, and now she would have laughed at the idea that Freddy was less heart-whole than herself. In point of fact, she, like most other young women, had a masculine ideal, whose lot, in some far-away, misty future, might, if the fates were propitious, come to be linked with hers—a transcendant individual, towering mentally and corporeally far above the common herd—a poet possibly, or a musician, or an artist—a man to whose terrestrial wants it would be the privilege of love to minister—a man, in short, utterly unlike anybody whom she had as yet encountered, and certainly most unlike this merry little grown-up schoolboy of an English baronet.

All this did not prevent her, however, from thinking very kindly of Freddy after she had reached her bedroom and was passing the events of the day in mental review. His honesty, his blunt directness of speech and the natural readiness with which all his thoughts rose to his lips, had an especial charm for her, whose youth had been passed in an atmosphere of artificiality, and whose nearest relations, being all in a false position with regard to one another, could seldom say what they thought, nor always think what they said. Here, in

England, one seemed to breathe a purer air. There was less refinement, perhaps, but more humanity and more truth. The very freaks of this disorderly household, over which Colonel Finch had shaken his head, were in a manner creditable to their perpetrators; for surely men who could find amusement in behaving like mischievous children could have nothing very heavy upon their consciences; and was not a rough young Englishman, even if a trifle too much given to horse-play, a more wholesome and hopeful object to look upon than one of those pale Parisians who have no boyhood, and who learn to sneer at life before they have well entered upon it?

Geneviève, in a word, felt, for some reason or other unusually light-hearted, and was disposed to view all her present surroundings through rose-coloured spectacles. Even when, some hours later, she was roused from her sleep by the sound of flying footsteps in the corridor outside, followed by a heavy fall, shrieks, shouts of laughter, and cries of "Sit on his head!" "Give it him, Miss Croft!"—even then she felt no animosity against the nocturnal revellers who had disturbed her rest, and only congratulated herself upon having taken the precaution of locking her door before getting into bed.

In the same charitable frame of mind she went down, the next morning, to the breakfast-room, where she found a large gathering already assembled. There were no obsequious servants in the room, as there would have been in a French château under similar circumstances; each guest apparently looked after himself, some seated at the table, some standing by a sideboard, on which were hams and pies and sundry small decanters; there was a ceaseless clatter of plates and a confused hubbub of voices. Every one—not even excepting Lord Lynchester, who had already arrayed himself in white flannel trousers and a striped coat of many colours—seemed to be in the highest of spirits; and, to judge by the rapidity with which the young men were disposing of the viands before them, the late hours of the previous night had affected no one's appetite. One of these youths exhibited a fine black eye; upon which subject a never-ending stream of facetious questions and remarks was being poured upon him from different quarters of the room. "Been playing cricket already this morning, Jones, and trying to catch the ball in your mouth, eh?"—"I say, Jones, you must get somebody to paint that eye of yours before you can show out of doors, you know. Per-

haps the person who coloured it for you would be so kind."—"What a quarrelsome fellow you must be, Jones. I'll swear you hadn't a black eye when you left the billiard-room last night." —"How did you manage it, Jones? Perhaps Miss Croft saw the accident happen; she went up at the same time as you did." And after each of these brilliant sallies arose a prolonged outburst of hilarity, while through it all Miss Croft, tall, fresh-coloured and rather hard-featured, her well-developed figure showing to advantage in a dress fitting like a glove, sat eating her breakfast in demure imperturbability, but with a lurking triumph in the side-glances with which, every now and again, she favoured the discomfited Jones. Geneviève understood but a small part of the by-play and the allusions, and was a little bewildered by the uproar; but there was something catching in this general exuberance and novel in the total freedom from restraint. Colonel Finch put her impressions into the vernacular when he remarked, in his semi-confidential way:—

"Free-and-easy lot, Miss Gervis; free-and-easy—yes. No starch, you know, no starch—what?"

Down at the cricket-ground, later, it was much the same scene over again. In the large

tent, from which Freddy's guests were supposed to be watching the fortunes of the Croft Manor eleven, a table was spread, piled up with fruit and cakes and other more substantial refreshments; the champagne and claret-cup were consumed as fast as half a dozen servants could supply the glasses; there seemed to be no break in the eating and drinking. By-and-by carriages began to drive up over the grass, bringing spectators from the several houses of the neighbourhood—thirsty souls all of them; for indeed it was a blazing summer's day, and there was scarcely breeze enough to stir the leaves of the old elms that formed a pleasant dark background to the smoothly-shaven cricket-field, with its players, in their white flannels, dotted here and there.

Freddy, standing behind Geneviève's chair, endeavoured to enlighten her as to the mysteries of the game, and confided to her some of his troubles as captain of the county eleven, relating how, by dint of unwearied exertions, he had brought Lynshire back to its old place among the cricketing counties, how he had organized this annual week as one means of securing a supply of fresh blood, how impossible it was to select a man without mortally offending a dozen others, how he had to bear the blame of every

defeat and got small credit for any victory, and how he had often been more than half inclined to throw the whole thing up, by George!

Meanwhile the Croft Manor score was mounting steadily, and the champagne was doing its work among the lookers-on. Every hit was rewarded by loud applause from the tent; and the comments which, from time to time, reached Geneviève's ears testified to the general good humour. Never was better cricket; never was such glorious weather; never was such a perfect ground. And so the day went merrily on, and morning passed into afternoon.

Only one incident occurred to mar the universal harmony. Lord Lynchester, having unfortunately returned his first ball into the hands of the bowler, came striding back to the tent in undisguised dudgeon, threw down his bat, and characterizing the entire proceedings as "utter skittles," declared his intention of hooking it out of this forthwith. Perhaps no one was very deeply distressed by this announcement, except Freddy, whose consternation was so evidently heartfelt that Geneviève felt quite sorry for him.

"Oh, I say, hang it all, Lyn!" he exclaimed; "you don't mean that surely. It would be too

bad to go off just as everything is getting into swing. Better luck next time, you know. There are three more matches to come on."

But Lord Lynchester was inexorable. He didn't care twopence whether he scored or not, he said; but playing cricket with such a lot of duffers was rot, and he was going to catch the three o'clock train for Brighton. He marched off accordingly, without going through the formality of saying good-bye to anybody.

Freddy stood reflectively rubbing his nose for a minute or two, and then turned to Claud Gervis, who was sitting on a bench by himself, watching the cricket with a rather melancholy and preoccupied air.

"Now, old man," said he, "here's your chance. Take Lynchester's place in the field to-day, and I'll promise you an innings to-morrow. We shall play the match out."

"My dear fellow," said Claud, "I haven't had a bat in my hand six times since I left school, and I was a regular muff, you know, even then. Oh no; I shall want a great deal of private instruction before you see me playing in public."

"Good gracious! you don't call this playing in public, do you? Everybody plays here; it's only for the fun of the thing. I'll bet you

know more about the game than lots of these chaps who think they ought to be playing for the county; and besides, I want to see what you can do. Who knows but we may make a player out of you? Haven't got any flannels? Oh, if that's all, I'll undertake to rig you out in something. Come up to the house, and we'll soon arrange that little difficulty."

Claud resisted a little longer, for form's sake; but he allowed himself to be persuaded without much additional pressure, being indeed only too eager to accept this, or any other means offered to him of occupying himself, and getting through the time which had begun to hang rather heavily upon his hands. The truth is that our hero was not enjoying himself at all. Thrown among a number of young men of his own age, all of whom were strangers to him, while all were upon the most intimate terms with one another, he had been made to feel rather uncomfortably his position as an outsider. The years that had elapsed since his school days, and which he had employed in making himself acquainted with the cities and manners of many nations, had opened a chasm between him and the young fellows of his own standing, who, during the same time, had been

tranquilly pursuing the ordinary course of an English gentleman's training. He felt himself older than they, and was conscious of his inability to take up the thread of his companionship with them where he had dropped it. He could not at once fall in with their ways of thought and tricks of speech, nor had the obstreperous gaiety of the previous night recommended itself to him by any means as favourably as it had done to his sister. The ceaseless practical jokes had failed to amuse him; the rowdiness and vulgarity of the whole business had bored and disgusted him, and of Miss Croft with her loud voice and her masculine ways, he had conceived a holy horror. Moreover, Miss Flemyng had seen fit to bear herself towards him in a singular and inexplicable manner. A nod and a smile from the other side of the dinner-table, and a few polite, but meaningless commonplaces addressed to him, at intervals, during the game of pool which had occupied the best part of the evening, had been all that he had been able to obtain by way of recognition from that capricious young lady. Not a word of that friendship which had been inaugurated in so off-hand a manner only a few days before; not a hint at the renewal of those pleasant confidences

which had been begun under the cedar-tree. The Nina of the Moated House, in truth, was an altogether different person from the Miss Flemyng of Croft Manor, who, though perfectly at her ease and at home with those about her, seemed determined to make them understand that, whatever others might do, she at least had no intention of abrogating the rights of her sex and station, or of permitting the jocular familiarities encouraged by her friend Miss Croft. All this was quite as it should be, and one could understand that some reserve of attitude might be requisite in so irreverent a household; but it was quite another thing to hold sincerely respectful and admiring friends at a distance, while allowing, and apparently enjoying, the ponderous and inane attentions of a long-legged dragoon from Lynchester barracks. Claud, not being in love, could not, of course, feel jealous; but he was puzzled and piqued; he did not see what he had done to merit such treatment; and he would have requested an explanation of it, if the perpetual presence of the aforesaid long-legged dragoon had not defeated all his attempts to obtain a private audience. A fragment of a dialogue, overheard in the tent, through the buzz of voices and the popping of champagne-corks—

ill-natured, like the generality of dialogues wherein women's names are brought forward between men—had not served to dissipate his growing bad humour.

"Oh, Flemyng, eh? Daughter of the man with the long white hair, who makes such a preposterous fool of himself on the bench sometimes?"

"Yes. Pretty girl, uncommonly pretty; but a deuce of a flirt—yes. Quiet here—devilish quiet and demure, and all that—has her reasons, you know, her reasons—what? Old lady wanted to marry her to Croft last year; took a deal of trouble about it—yes. No money, you know; but looks and manners. Might do worse. Ballet girl, or something of that kind, you know—what? Always in a funk of some catastrophe happening, poor old thing!—yes. Nothing came of it, however."

"Croft wouldn't come up to the scratch, eh?"

"Well, some people said she wouldn't have him—thought he was a little too fond of ladies in general, or something. But between ourselves, it isn't often the girl who throws the man over in these cases—ha, ha, ha!—what? She hasn't broken her heart. Pick up somebody else, I dare say. Sharp girl, though—

keeps in with the Crofts. Useful people, you know—take you up to London for the season, and buy you a new frock every now and then—yes. Have another glass of that champagne. It's all right; looked at the corks before I committed myself. Old soldier, you know—what?"

Careless shafts of calumny, shot at random, do not, fortunately, always hit the traduced person; but on the other hand, it is to be regretted that they should so often wound or graze others in the course of their flight. Nina continued to smile upon her dragoon in blissful unconsciousness of the shocking things that were being said about her, and it was Claud who retired to a bench at the extreme end of the tent, and there sat him down alone in profound disgust with the human race at large. I don't know whether king David was the first person to exclaim that all men are liars; but he is the only one that ever I heard of who qualified his ejaculation as a hasty one. Who expects to hear—alas! who can flatter himself that he always tells—the truth about his neighbours? We are all of us in the hands of our friends, and, Heaven be praised! we seldom know what they say of us. And in nine cases out of ten it does not in the least signify. But Claud,

who was young, and as yet only partially resigned to the ways of the best of possible worlds, was foolish enough to think that it signified a good deal; and what with indignation against poor Colonel Finch, fear lest the old fellow's words might be true, and annoyance that he should feel such fear, he was worrying himself absurdly over matters with which he had no concern when Freddy's well-timed proposition came to release him from these unprofitable musings.

Next to hard work, hard play is the best of antidotes for mental anxiety; and before Claud had been a quarter of an hour in the field, he had forgotten all about Miss Flemyng. His extreme eagerness to prove to his neighbours that he was not, as most of them seemed to imagine, three parts a foreigner, but as good an Englishman as any of them, kept his whole attention concentrated upon the game, and he was so far successful as to be rewarded with several cries of "Well fielded!" And then, towards the close of the day, he had the great good fortune to make a sensational catch—one of those catches which, for being wholly unexpected and unpremeditated, do not the less cover a man with glory. He himself said afterwards that he had made a wild leap into

the air, stretching out his left hand with a sort of forlorn hope of stopping the ball, which had somehow stuck in his fingers; and this was probably a sufficiently accurate statement of the facts; but at the moment he would hardly have given so modest an account of himself; and indeed the prolonged applause which greeted him from all sides of the field was enough to justify him in feeling that he had accomplished a great and wonderful feat. This was very delightful; but Fortune had yet other favours in store for him.

The Croft Manor eleven began their second innings with an hour of play before them; and when the stumps were drawn, Claud, who had been sent in third, carried out his bat triumphantly, having managed to put together a score of no less than fourteen, comprising two threes and a four. Perhaps these hits were rather the result of audacity than of skill; but that did not prevent the gallery from good-naturedly according a warm reception to the stranger, as he walked in; and when Claud saw Nina Flemyng clapping enthusiastically, to the imminent peril of a pair of eight-buttoned gloves, while the dragoon, who was not a cricketer, stood pulling his moustache in the background, he began to think that he had

been a little too hard upon poor humanity earlier in the day.

Geneviève was not present to assist at her brother's triumph. Shortly after luncheon, Lady Croft, who knew nothing, and cared less, about cricket, and in her heart cordially detested these yearly gatherings, with their accompanying noise and racket, had made her way timorously into the tent, as into a den of thieves, and had begged Miss Gervis to come out for a drive with her.

"I want you to do us all a great kindness," she explained, as soon as she was safely away from the dangerous neighbourhood of the cricket-ball, and could breathe more freely. "My son tells me you are a wonderful violinist —*so* charming! I never heard of a lady playing a violin before, except Madame What's-her-name; and she, of course, is a professional— and *will* you drive over to Southlands with me, and fetch your instrument? It seems a great shame to take you away from all the other young people; but your papa said you were not very devoted to cricket; and if it is not asking *too* much of you——"

Geneviève could only say that she would be very happy to oblige her hostess.

"Oh, *thank* you." Lady Croft always spoke

in italics, and with a certain plaintive intonation which seemed to imply that she was quite unable to cope with the troubles of this life, but was really doing the best she could. "There was another thing," she continued hesitatingly. "My son was very anxious that I should ask your—your friend, Miss Peters—Potter—"

"Potts," said Geneviève.

"Potts—*thank* you—that I should ask her to spend a few days with us; and I did speak to Mr. Gervis about it; but he said he thought it would be better not."

"Oh yes; I knew he would object," observed Geneviève quietly. "I am very sorry anything was said about it."

Lady Croft made a little deprecating gesture. "But, my dear, I *think*, you know, your papa was right. Of course I should have been only too glad, I'm sure; but you see one does not *generally* invite that sort of—— That is, you understand——"

"I quite understand," Geneviève said.

And so she and Lady Croft drove off to Southlands; and on their return the violin had the back-seat of the carriage to itself.

I have never performed upon any musical instrument myself—except, during a brief period

of my youth, upon the cornopean, which I was getting on with quite nicely, and used to practice every day in the retirement of my bedroom, until a deputation of my nearest relatives waited upon me, with tears in their eyes, to implore me to desist—with this exception, I say, I have no personal experience of the joy of producing divine sounds; but I think I can in some degree realize the ecstasy of a finished musician in his art. I can fancy that to look down from a platform upon an audience made up of all sorts of human specimens, clever and dull, refined and vulgar, happy and unhappy—and to possess the conscious power of not only pleasing the ears of every one of them, but of touching the higher part of their nature, and lifting them for the time being to its level—I can fancy that this might be a position which one would not change for any that the world can offer. Or do you think the consummate masters of a most difficult art are too much absorbed by technicalities, too keenly alive to the necessity of correctness of execution, to share in their hearers' delight, and that what seems as easy and spontaneous as the song of a bird is really the result of an unremitting attention to prosaic details? I remember once hearing Mr. Flemyng put

the latter query to a circle of patient listeners. "This train of thought," says he, with that air of a benevolent and patronizing lecturer which becomes him so well, "leads us back to the old question, what is genius?—which we have all heard defined, over and over again, as a capacity for taking infinite pains. Now genius is obviously of two kinds, the creative and the executive; and these two are not necessarily allied to the separate branches of art to which they should seem of nature to belong; so that you will find painters and sculptors, for instance, whose conceptions are less lofty than their carrying out of them; and musicians, again, who confer a meaning entirely their own upon the work of other men. The genius —I say advisedly genius—of our young friend Miss Gervis" (here Miss Gervis receives a flattering bow) "is distinctly of the creative order; and she will perhaps pardon me if I remind her that the bestowal upon it of infinite pains is essential to bring it to its highest development."

The truth is that Geneviève's were anything but painstaking performances. They were striking, impassioned, full of significance; but, no doubt, often incorrect, and influenced, I should imagine, by no set of rules whatsoever.

Her violin was her tongue. Through its medium she poured forth the secrets of a reserved nature—the delight, the sadness, the wide sympathies which with her could never have found expression in speech; and whatever may be the experience of more skilful artists, it was evident that in her case execution was an unmixed happiness. This was doubtless the reason why she invariably carried her audience away with her. The guests at Croft Manor were assuredly as unimpressionable a set of commonplace folks as you would be likely to find in any English country-house during the cricketing season; moreover, at the time when Miss Gervis, at Lady Croft's request, took her violin out of its case, the majority of them were longing to exchange their dress-coats for a less formal garb, and to get away downstairs to billiards and smoke; yet she held them entranced for the best part of half an hour, and might have done so much longer had she yielded to entreaties as sincere as they were unanimous.

Often, in after times, the memory of that evening revisited Freddy—the spacious room and the groups dispersed in different parts of it; the soft light of the shaded lamps falling upon many faces, some sunburnt, some wrinkled,

some painted, but all after a fashion made beautiful by temporary self-forgetfulness; the tall, thin figure in its white draperies, standing with one leg slightly advanced and the right foot resting on a footstool, the small head a little thrown back, the long slender fingers moving deftly over the strings, the rushing bow so delicately poised, while all the air vibrated with the chords of those wild scherzos and thrilling adagios. The young fellow's heart thumped with a mixture of triumph and discouragement. How could he have had the presumption to think of that exquisite, unearthly being as his wife? How could he hope that she would ever take more than a friendly and condescending interest in one so far beneath her as he now felt himself to be? He was overwhelmed with shame at the thought that only a few weeks ago he had been smitten with the charms of Miss Lambert, and that *she* was aware of the disgraceful circumstance. He felt an almost irresistible inclination to throw himself at her feet there and then, and tell her everything—that she was his first love, as she would be his last (past little affairs being mere flashes in the pan, as it were, not worthy of mention or remembrance); that henceforth his life belonged to

her alone; that if she would but hold him out the faintest encouragement, he would wait, and strive to earn her love, without murmuring at any delay; but that if she turned away from him, despair, dissipation and death must inevitably ensue. It is, however, hardly necessary to say that he did not yield to this rash impulse, but only sighed, and murmured "Thank you," like everybody else.

Geneviève had become the centre of a respectfully admiring throng, and was still standing by the piano, where she had taken up her station from mere force of habit—for she had been playing by heart and without accompaniment—when a gentleman from whom she had certainly not expected either praise or notice advanced and joined the group. Oddly enough, this was the first time that Mr. Gervis had listened to his daughter's violin. He had seen it, indeed, from time to time, in Varinka's drawing-room in Paris, but being afflicted with a sensitive ear, had been careful to make no remark whatever upon what might so easily prove to be an instrument of torture; and now he had heard, had been surprised and enchanted, and was coming up to pay his compliments to the lady, as he would have done to any stranger.

"I congratulate you," said he, with a little bow. "You have talent and originality, and I think you may be a great violinist, one of these days. But—you are too advanced an artist to care only for politenesses—may I permit myself a criticism or two?"

"Please do," said Geneviève, almost forgetting, in the pleasure of being praised by one whom she knew to be a true connoisseur, who her interlocutor was.

"Then let me advise you to cultivate repose. Repose, in the first place, of attitude and demeanour. That inspired air, that appearance of ecstasy, are charming; but it needs only the slightest thing in the world to make them ridiculous. An artist should avoid all such risks."

Geneviève frowned; this was not the sort of criticism she had expected. "I am sorry if I looked ridiculous," said she drily; "but I have never given the subject a thought."

Gervis went on, quite unmoved by the interruption: "And as with attitude, so with execution. You have a tendency towards exaggeration. You accentuate certain passages overmuch, and you hurry the time so in others that no accompanyist would be able to keep up with you. But these are faults which are easily

curable. You have had lessons of course: may I ask who your masters have been?"

Geneviève mentioned a few names, more or less known. "But I have practised very little," she said. "All that I really know was taught me long ago, when I was quite a child, by Herr von Elbitz, an Austrian. He was very kind to me. He came often to the house, and took great pains, and it was he who gave me my first violin. But he went away suddenly, and I have never heard of him since," she concluded rather sadly.

A peculiar smile showed itself about the corners of Mr. Gervis's thin lips. "Ah," remarked he, "I think I recollect your instructor. A particularly good-looking young gentleman who was among the Princess's intimates at a certain time. And so he was very kind, and took great pains? What are those lines I have read somewhere?—

While miss delights in her spinnet, the fiddler may a fortune get,
And oft the dancing-master's art, leaps from the toes to touch the heart.

And so he went away suddenly, did he? The Princess's friends not unfrequently do, I have observed."

Geneviève understood the innuendo. Alas!

in such a home as hers had been, it would have been scarcely possible to conceal from her the interpretation placed by the world upon her step-mother's numberless platonic friendships; nor in truth had that maligned lady been chary of her confidences upon this point. The girl raised her eyes to Gervis's face, for one second, with a look of bitter anger and contempt, and then, silently turning her back upon him, walked away to the sofa where Freddy Croft was still sitting and chewing the cud of his reflections. Fortunately, the by-standers, who had listened in no little astonishment to the opening of this odd colloquy between the father and daughter, had now dispersed, and its termination was not overheard.

Mr. Gervis looked after her, without ceasing to smile, and then slowly returned to his place beside Lady Croft, whose maternal eyes had found out Freddy's secret by this time, and whose heart was in such a flutter of agitation and hope that reticence was no longer in her power.

"I am so *delighted* with your daughter," she began. "*Such* a dear girl!—so quiet and natural and distinguished-looking. And her playing, of course, is simply superb! I am devoted to music; so is my son. Oh, Mr. Gervis, I can't

tell you how I long to see him settled down, with a wife whom one knew to be really *nice* to look after him. If *only* the two young people would take a fancy to one another, how gladly I would make room for them, and look out for a new home!"

"You do us too much honour, Lady Croft," answered Mr. Gervis imperturbably; "but do not pack up your things yet. What with my invincible horror of marriage in the abstract, and what with your son's rather volatile disposition, your plan seems to me to have more than one very good chance of coming to nothing. As for my daughter, I am not very well acquainted with her; but it seems to me possible that she might disappoint you. Ladies who play the violin as she does do not generally belong to the model wife and mother class; and I have just discovered that she has a temper."

Here was a pretty reception to accord to the best *parti* in Lynshire! Lady Croft was more than half inclined to administer the dignified snub which such language merited; but she refrained—partly because she was afraid of the man, and partly because, as she said to herself, he was evidently mad.

CHAPTER X.

A CORRESPONDENCE.

One of Princess Varinka's most frequent and bitter complaints against her absent husband was that he kept certain paid spies to dog her footsteps, to watch all her movements and actions, and duly to report upon the same to their employer. In a general way, she bore this alleged persecution lightly enough, declaring that she had nothing to conceal, and that those who wished to know how her life was spent were perfectly welcome to inform themselves upon the subject in any way that might seem good to them; but sometimes a fit of panic and suspicion would seize upon her, during which every member of her household was regarded, and told that he was regarded, with distrust. It was no uncommon thing for her, while in one of these moods, to dismiss her entire staff of servants at an hour's notice;

nor did even Miss Potts's unquestionable honour and integrity always avail to protect her from insinuations of the most cruel and unworthy description. Poor Miss Potts, smarting under her wrongs, but withheld by her sworn allegiance to Geneviève from the dignified course of resigning the somewhat ill-defined position which she occupied, would go about her avocations, day after day, with red eyes and a broken-hearted aspect, until such time as Varinka, with soft purrings and feline caresses lavished upon "her dear Potts, her good, faithful Potts," saw fit to re-establish friendly relations. As a proof of restored confidence, the princess would go so far as to borrow a ten-pound note from her good faithful old Potts upon occasion; for in that luxurious establishment there was often a temporary lack of hard cash.

Now it had happened that one of these recurrent outbreaks had taken place a few days previously to the Princess's departure from Southlands, to be followed by the customary reconciliation; and one result of the latter appears to have been a rather voluminous correspondence between the two ladies. A part of this correspondence has now—no matter by what means—come into the possession of the painstaking compiler of this narrative, and may

very well be made use of here, as a means of helping the history of the Gervis family on its way. Here is No. 1.

"Southlands, August, 18—.

"My dear Madam,

"I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your most kind and friendly letter, which reached me by this morning's post, and I can assure you that the flattering language in which you are so good as to speak of me was *not needed* to convince me that your doubt of my fidelity was no more than a passing misapprehension, arising out of circumstances with which I can *well* sympathize, and (as you are pleased to phrase it) make allowances for.

"It is indeed most natural that you should wish for the fullest information as to how our dear Geneviève's time is passed, now that she is deprived of your ever watchful care, and I gladly place my poor pen at your service, regretting only that I have not the power of chronicling events in that lively and graphic style which you, dear madam, possess in so eminent a degree.

"Geneviève tells me that she has herself written to you a long account of her visit to Croft Manor, where she seems to have en-

joyed herself greatly, but where, judging by what I have heard from her and Mr. Claud, the behaviour of the inmates is *most extraordinary*, and, *I* should say, scarcely becoming gentlemen and gentlewomen. But during my long absence from England manners have undergone so complete a change that I feel I am no longer able to speak with authority upon this subject; and in justice to Sir Frederick Croft (who, to my great surprise, remembered me, and sent me the kindest of messages through dear Geneviève), I must add that, notwithstanding the questionable taste of some of his proceedings, I am convinced that his *heart* is in the right place. He is an amiable and generous-minded young man, though mercurial, I fear.

"Since the return home of our little party, no incident of any importance has occurred to break the daily round of our occupations and amusements; but the fine weather which we continue to enjoy, together with the various pleasures of English country life, such as driving, lawn-tennis, and riding on horseback—the latter a most beneficial exercise for those whose nerves are strong enough to permit them to indulge in it—have prevented Geneviève from feeling dull; and I am thankful to say

that I never saw our dear girl in better health and spirits.

"We have seen a good deal of company in a quiet way, and we are favoured by having a few exceptionally agreeable neighbours, or perhaps I ought rather to say friends; for as such they are, I think, now regarded by the family. Mrs. Knowles, whom doubtless you know by repute, has quite won the affections of our young people, who frequently visit her at her house in Beachborough, and bring back droll accounts of her eccentric habits and startling speeches. I have myself only once had occasion to exchange words with this singular lady; namely, about a week ago, when she drove up in her old-fashioned dark green chariot to pay a formal afternoon call. It seems that she had not been at Southlands for many years past, and she was greatly interested in the various changes brought about by time in the place, and insisted upon being conducted all over the gardens, though she is infirm, and can only walk with the aid of a stick. She was just about to re-enter her carriage when she caught sight of me, and advancing towards me immediately, accosted me in an abrupt, but not unfriendly tone, with—'Oh, you are Miss Potts, eh? How do you do, Miss Potts?'

"Without any further preface, she proceeded to put to me a series of short, sharp questions relating to Geneviève's education and tastes, and to the manner in which she had been accustomed to spend her leisure time, when abroad. This species of cross-examination did not much please me; but I responded unreservedly, for I was a little thrown off my balance by the suddenness of the attack, and confused by the consciousness that Mrs. Knowles's eyes, which are singularly bright and piercing, were fixed upon me while I was speaking. When, however, she went on to deliver judgment—if I may so express myself—upon certain family matters, and to speak of you, dear madam, in far from respectful terms, I felt it my duty to say that I was bound by ties of gratitude and affection to the Gervis family, and that I must beg to be excused from listening to observations reflecting upon *any* member of it. Thereupon Mrs. Knowles laughed, saying that I was 'a sensible woman not to chatter,' and, after a few more remarks, which I prefer not to repeat, got into her carriage, and was driven away. She is, I believe, a good and benevolent lady; but it is easy to see that she prides herself upon being what is called a woman of the world, and that her favour would

be readily accorded to any one who took pleasure in listening to her *sarcasms*, and replied to them in a *similar vein.*

"A more frequent guest in this house, and one whose society is, I confess, much more agreeable to me, is Mr. Flemyng, a man of high scholarly attainments, from whose conversation profit, as well as pleasure, may be always derived, although the subjects of which he treats are often too deep for the comprehension of ordinary people, like myself, and although, when discussing religious topics, he displays that tendency towards latitudinarianism—not to say *free thought*—which, I fear, is almost universal among the distinguished thinkers of the present day. This is, no doubt, a subject for sincere regret; but Mr. Flemyng's great natural gifts, his clear intellect, and the lofty standpoint from which he regards those problems of life which most of us are too apt to ignore, or carelessly set on one side, make him a truly valuable addition to our small circle, and I rejoice that he should come so often among us.

"Of course such a man as I have attempted to describe is a tempting object for the covert ridicule of *cynical* persons; and it has vexed me to observe the ill-concealed laughter with

which certain stratagems (doubtless carefully prepared beforehand) to lead him into self-contradiction have been rewarded. I am convinced, nevertheless, that his society and example cannot but be beneficial to our dear young people, who, as is only natural at their age, are a little inclined towards frivolity.

"I wish I could speak and think as favourably of his daughter, Miss Nina Flemyng; but I cannot conscientiously do so. Her self-possession and *aplomb* may be found fascinating by gentlemen, and her capricious change of moods, varying from extreme taciturnity to the most unreserved communicativeness, may impose upon some people, and lead them to set her down as a *creature of impulse;* but *me* she has never deceived for one moment; and were I to tell all——" (Here the manuscript is disfigured by two lines carefully erased.) "The truth is that she is a *sly girl*, whose designs are only too evident to me. This is strictly between ourselves, dear madam, and I am sure you will not allow it to go any further; but I fear that she has made up her mind to captivate Mr. Claud, and, what is worse, that she has succeeded. He is with her morning, noon, and night. Now it is one pretext, now another; but whether she makes up a party to spend the

afternoon in sailing in the yacht, or whether he goes over to the Moated House to play lawn-tennis; whether they wade together into deep pools among the rocks to catch prawns—a pretty pursuit for a young lady!—or whether they explore the lanes in search of ferns—and I will answer for it that she does not know a hart's tongue from a polypody—some excuse for their spending the greater part of their time in one another's company is always ready. Ah, if men could only see girls as we see them! If they knew what that affectation of coldness one day and exaggerated friendliness the next really meant, and what old, thread-bare stratagems are thought good enough to delude such simpletons as the wisest of them become the moment a pretty woman thinks fit to devote herself to them—if, in a word, they had any common sense *at all*, young persons like Miss Flemyng would never get husbands. I lose all patience, and I feel myself growing quite hot and angry, as I write about it. To think that Mr. Claud, so clever and clear-sighted in cases where the prospects of others seem in danger of being compromised, should be so blind to his own peril! I am only a poor old governess, and perhaps I ought to mind my own business and hold my tongue; but I have known Mr.

Claud since he was a tiny curly-headed boy in a blouse and short socks—always tumbling down he was, and cutting his poor bare knees, and well I remember how he used to come running to me for some of my *pommade divine* —and now it breaks my heart to think of his throwing himself away upon a fortune-hunting flirt. Only yesterday afternoon I was walking on the cliffs, and what did I see on the sands below me? Mr. Claud standing on a rock, with his prawning-net in his hand, and that odious girl a few yards off, vowing—for I understood her gesticulations well enough—that she was afraid to cross the space of shallow water that separated them from one another. Of course he came splashing back to her; of course there were entreaties and protestations; and then—I hardly like to write it—he actually took that shameless creature up in his arms, and *carried her across!*

"Dear madam, I feel that I have been a little indiscreet in mentioning this incident, of which I have spoken to *no one* but yourself; but it will serve to show you that I have *real* grounds for my alarm. Although nothing has passed between us upon the subject, I know that dear Geneviève shares my anxiety, and that it is making her unhappy. How much of all this

may be suspected, and how much approved, by *other persons* I have no idea; but I can scarcely suppose that Mr. Claud's marriage at so early an age and to so undesirable a lady could be viewed with satisfaction by *any one* who felt an interest in his welfare.

"But it is time for me to conclude this letter which I should not have ventured to make so long, had you not requested me to send you a detailed account of the manner in which our days are spent and an accurate description of all our intimates. Trusting that I may have acquitted myself of this task to your satisfaction,

"I remain, dear madam,

"Yours most truly,

"MATILDA POTTS."

II.

"Villa Beausite, Trouville, — August, 187—.

"Allons, voyons, ma très-chère Potts, qu'est-ce que vous me chantez ta? Have I asked you for a description of that insupportable old Flemyng? Do you think by any chance that I am interested in the gossip of Mrs. Knowles, or the amours of Claud? Let him carry about all the young girls of the vicinity in his arms, if he pleases. C'est shocking, si vous voulez,

mais enfin c'est son affaire. Parlez-moi plutôt de notre jeune baronet. What does he do? Does he come often to see you? Is he well received? And Geneviève—does she appear to regard him with favourable eyes? There, my good Potts, is what I should have wished to hear: the rest is all one to me. When you have any news of some importance to give, you will write to me, will you not? But for the love of God, do not afflict me with your provincials! They bore me to death, and I have not the smallest curiosity to learn their sentiments with regard to me. But, after all, it will perhaps be easier to you to tell me the whole of your history than to suppress a part of it. Continue then, dear and respectable Potts, continue always; and believe in the gratitude of your devoted

"V."

III.

"Southlands, — August, 187—.

"DEAR MADAM,

"Pray pardon me if my last letter was too discursive, and if I allowed myself to treat in it of matters in which, and persons with whom, you could feel no sympathy. My excuse must be that I should always be deeply in-

terested in Mr. Claud, as the brother of my dear Geneviève, even if his uniform kindness had not long ago won my gratitude; and excuse my adding that I believe that you, dear madam, are less indifferent to his happiness than you would have me suppose. I will not, however, take up your time by saying anything more about him to-day than that he continues to devote himself as assiduously as ever to Miss Flemyng, and that we see little of him here, except at the breakfast and dinner hours.

"Of Sir Frederick Croft I should doubtless have spoken at greater length in my last letter, had he been in this neighbourhood at the time when I wrote; but he was away just then—I think at the Goodwood races—and it is only within the last few days that he has returned. Now, however, he is in this house constantly; and I may add that he has made himself liked by all who dwell here.

"Dear madam, I feel some delicacy and hesitation in entering upon a subject which, near and dear though it may be to both our hearts, is yet one upon which you have never, *in plain words*, addressed me. Nevertheless, I am convinced that you would not keep your wishes with regard to Geneviève a secret from me, whose sole object in life is to forward her

happiness; and upon my *discretion* I need not say that you can rely. Your letter, which, as it happened, arrived on the evening of Sir Frederick's return, and was read by me while he was actually in the room, was like a sudden revelation to me. How I could have been so dull as not to have guessed, long ago, what your hopes were I cannot imagine; but I suppose the truth is that my wits are not quite as bright as they once were; and besides, I have always fancied—I am thankful to find *erroneously*—that you had other views for my dear girl, and that you did not look forward to seeing her established in an *English home*.

"Well, my dear madam, I can report to you that, so far as *he* is concerned, your mind may be at rest. I have, of course, watched him narrowly ever since my eyes became opened by the hint conveyed in your note, and I cannot doubt that he is—if I may allow myself the expression—over head and ears in love. Everything proves it. It is not only that he rides over here every morning, staying usually to luncheon, and sometimes allowing himself to be persuaded to remain for dinner also; it is not only that he has presented her with a bull-terrier puppy—a troublesome little creature, I must confess, which is always running behind

me and biting my heels, and has already destroyed two of the drawing-room cushions—it is not that he follows her about like her shadow, and listens to her violin as though it were the music of the angels in Heaven that he heard. All this might only show that his *fancy* was engaged; and, from what I have been told and have seen, Sir Frederick is *impressionable*, not to say fickle. But there is more than this. A palpable, an *unmistakable* change has come over the young man. His spirits are by no means what they were a few weeks ago; his manner is often absent and slightly melancholy; he has certainly grown thinner; and what strikes me most of all is the respectfulness of his demeanour towards Geneviève, whose every wish appears to be a law to him. May it be so always, until the end of their lives!

"And now as to *her*. Here I cannot speak so positively. If any one could interpret her thoughts, surely I should be able to do so; but I am not yet *sure* whether she has realized the extent of Sir Frederick's devotion; still less whether she has discovered any echo to it in her own heart. You know how reserved she is, and that all her feelings lie *deep*, and do not readily rise to the surface. This morning, however, while I was arranging the flowers in

the morning-room, and she and Sir Frederick were seated by the window, some words passed between them which gave me matter for subsequent reflection. She was urging him—*most* properly, I am sure—to seek for some definite object to which to devote his energies and his abundance of leisure; and he, while admitting that his life was a purposeless one, was complaining that there was no way open to him of making it less so. For parliamentary duties, he said, he felt himself unfit, and he added, in his jocular way, that street-preaching and taking the chair at temperance meetings were the only other safety-valves that he knew of for young men of property in search of a mission. 'But there is your property itself,' said she; 'surely there must be interests connected with that, if you would look for them.' And then, to my great surprise, she began quite coolly to state her views of what an ideal English landowner ought to be.

"Now, when I heard her talking as glibly as possible about rent-audits and high farming and the prospects of the agricultural labourer, I began to ask myself how and why she had learnt all about these matters, of which I am sure that she was as ignorant a fortnight ago as I am at this hour; and I very much doubt

whether it is interest in the Southlands estate that has caused her to take so much trouble. In short, I have a suspicion—perhaps I ought to say a *hope*—that what you desire may come to pass. For indeed I do hope with all my heart that, when my dearest Geneviève's choice is made, it may fall upon one who loves her as Sir Frederick Croft evidently does, and who is as estimable and well meaning as I truly believe him to be. Only—" Here we come to more erasures and a large, watery-looking smudge.

"But I trust dear madam," resumes the writer, beginning a fresh page, "that you will pardon a foolish old woman if she cannot all at once conquer certain misgivings. All this has come upon me with great suddenness; and although I have always known that sooner or later I must expect to part with my dearest child, and that it would be for her happiness that I should do so, I did not imagine that the hour of separation was so near at hand. If, therefore, some natural depression of spirits (for I cannot forget Sir Fredrick's *very* recent entanglement with another lady, nor have I reached my time of life without some knowledge of what *all* men are) prevents me from expressing myself in an unreservedly joyful strain, and causes me to cut my letter a little

shorter than I had intended, you will not, I hope, dear madam, be displeased with

"Your sincere and obliged friend,
"MATILDA POTTS."

"P. S.—What the designs and wishes of *a certain person* are with regard to the possibility which we contemplate I am wholly unable to surmise. He cannot be ignorant of what is going on; but he exhibits neither approval nor disapproval, only watching them sometimes with a kind of amused smile, and screwing up his eyes in the way that you know of, which *may* be only shortsightedness, but which, to *my* mind, always gives the countenance a sinister expression."

IV.

"Trouville, — August, 187—.

"You wretch, Potts! You heartless, hypocritical wretch! Where have you found the audacity to throw that horrible news in my face, and to pretend to think that you were giving me pleasure? That you should deceive me and plot against me in my absence, that does not surprise me; you are capable of it. That you should play the game of my enemies, while

assuring me of your fidelity, that is nothing more than I have suspected you of for a long time past. But that you should have the effrontery to disclose your conduct, and to sustain to me that I—*I*—have desired to make a match between Geneviève and an Englishman whom I have never even seen—*mais ça n'a pas de nom!* You make me sick, Potts! You speak of it very much at your ease—of this marriage, this parting with your 'dearest child.' *Et moi donc?* Is she not my child as much as yours? Is it not under my roof that she has spent her life? And now, among you, you have agreed to rob me of her—to marry her in England, where you know that I cannot breathe, and where she would be as lost to me as if she were dead.

"*Mais il n'en sera rien! c'est moi qui vous en réponds!* By this post I write to Gervis—I remind him of his promises, his oaths—I demand that Geneviève be restored to me immediately, and I expose your perfidy, you infamous Potts! You will accompany her, I suppose. It is your duty, and your room will be ready for you. But I will not speak to you. And do not permit yourself to address another letter to me. You have planted a dagger in my heart, and I can never forgive you.

"VARINKA, PRINCESSE OURANOFF."

V.

"Southlands, — August, 187—.

"MADAME LA PRINCESSE,

"In spite of the prohibition you have laid upon me, I find myself compelled to reply to your letter received yesterday, which, I need hardly say, has caused me a great deal of pain. Perhaps I shall best consult my dignity by leaving unnoticed the injurious accusations and epithets with which you have seen fit to assail me, and by trusting to *your own conscience* to tell you whether they have been, or are, deserved. What I have to confess and to apologize for is, firstly, that I misinterpreted the meaning of your previous letter, and, secondly, that I imprudently committed to writing impressions which may prove to be wholly without foundation, and which I should in any case have done more wisely to keep to myself.

"I must now say that I have Mr. Gervis's commands to convey a message to you; but I feel that I cannot discharge this task without a brief explanation, and even at the risk of wearying or displeasing you, I must relate the circumstances under which it was imposed upon me.

"After breakfast, this morning, I was sitting

alone in the rose-garden, whither I had repaired in search of the *solitude* which I felt to be necessary for me, when I perceived Mr. Gervis approaching me with an open letter in his hand. 'You heard from the Princess to-day,' he began. I signified assent. 'Do not distress yourself,' said he—for I was unable upon the spur of the moment to subdue the agitation in which he had surprised me—'Take example by me. I also have been favoured with a shower of abuse quite as heavy as any that can have fallen upon you, and you see that it has left me perfectly calm.'

"He then went on to make some observations upon the danger and folly of letter-writing, remarking that he himself had for years abstained as much as possible from all correspondence, except such as related to matters of business. 'And for that reason,' he added, in conclusion, 'I will ask you to be so kind as to include my reply to the Princess in your own.'

"I ventured to submit that such a course would be eminently distasteful to me; but he rejoined that to write with his own hand would be equally distasteful to *him*, and that, all things considered, he preferred putting me to inconvenience to suffering it himself. He then proceeded to dictate to me the message which

it was his desire that I should despatch to you. 'Remind the Princess, in the first place,' he said, 'that I made her no distinct promise whatsoever. Remind her, in the second place, that I committed myself to a strong expression of opinion; and tell her that that opinion remains unchanged. Inform her, in the third place, that it is not my intention to send Miss Gervis back to France at present; but that the allowance for her maintenance, which has hitherto been paid quarterly to the Princess's bankers, will continue to be so paid, whether my daughter's visit to me is or is not prolonged. That,' said he, 'will, I hope, be found reassuring.'

"With these words he turned, as if to leave me; but my anxiety and my apprehensions emboldened me to detain him for a few moments, during which I endeavoured to explain what it was that I dreaded on my dear Geneviève's behalf, and pleaded that she should not be exposed to the risk of contracting a serious attachment, if nothing were intended to come of it. He listened to me with great patience, and spoke in terms which I could not but feel to be most gratifying, *if sincere*, of my attachment to my former pupil; but he gave no definite reply to my question, merely pointing out to me that the world is full of risks for us

all, and that he could not shut his house to Sir Frederick Croft, or to other young men, because, in the event of their subsequently asking him for his daughter's hand, he might find it necessary to meet them with a refusal. I was forced to admit the justice of this observation; and with that our interview came to an end.

"I have now, Madame la Princesse, given you a full and true report of this conversation. I abstain from comments upon it, which, in your present unfortunate frame of mind towards me, might not be found acceptable by you. I think it, however, my duty to add—lest at some future time you should accuse me of want of candour, or of suppressing facts—that Sir Frederick Croft is at present staying in this house, where he has been invited to remain for three days, on the occasion of the Beachborough regatta, his own family being, as I understand, away from home.

"I am alone in the house while I write, the entire party having driven down to the town early in the day to witness the aquatic sports. They were so kind as to press me urgently to accompany them; but I did not feel myself in sufficiently good spirits to yield to their friendly entreaties, and I was unwilling to damp the hilarity of the party by intruding upon it

the presence of one who has never been able to assume a cheerful exterior while suffering inwardly from the *unmerited* displeasure of those to whom she is attached and whom she has ever striven to serve faithfully.

"I have the honour to be, Madame la Princesse,

"Your obedient servant,

"MATILDA POTTS."

CHAPTER XI.

BEACHBOROUGH REGATTA.

Beachborough regatta-day is essentially a festival of the people. The upper stratum of local society only countenances the proceedings to the extent of forwarding its subscription to Mr. Mayor for prizes and fireworks, and for the most part shuts itself up indoors, grumbling and growling, and thanking Heaven that the 20th of August comes but once a year. Meanwhile the town throws off its customary air of sober gentility, gives itself up to mirth of a low order, and descends, for the time being, to the level of Margate on a bank holiday. After eleven o'clock in the morning, all the shops are closed; the young gentlemen and ladies from behind the counter emerge, and show themselves upon the Esplanade in gay apparel; excursion trains from Lynchester, and other more distant places, bring hundreds of over-

heated strangers to swell the throng; brass bands, itinerant photographers and nigger minstrels take possession of the beach; and it must be confessed that expressions may occasionally be heard flying about among the ranks of this assemblage which are not of a strictly parliamentary kind.

Now if there is one thing that we abhor more than another in Beachborough it is vulgarity. It grieves us to see these dreadful people making themselves at home upon our shingle, scattering orange-peel and cherry-stones upon our asphalte, and lolling upon the benches which are wont to afford rest to our own noble persons. The whole spectacle is revolting to us; and it is as much as we can do to cast a disdainful glance, every now and then, from behind our closed windows, at the boat races, the duck hunts and the greasy poles, which give such unbounded delight to our humbler fellow-townsmen outside.

"When this infernal regatta day comes round, sir," says Admiral Bagshawe, "I shut my daughters up in the back rooms of the house. You may talk to me till you're black in the face about the amusements of the people; but if the people can't amuse themselves without getting beastly drunk in broad daylight and using

words, sir, which make me shudder—positively shudder" (and he an old sailor too! What licence of language *can* these miscreants have permitted themselves?) "all I can say is, the less the people amuse themselves the better—the less the better, by gad!"

From all this it will be perceived that it was really very wrong of Freddy Croft to represent to his friends at Southlands that they ought to show themselves in Beachborough on the regatta-day. As, however, they were able to view the saturnalia from the deck of their yacht, and never approached nearer than within a mile and a half of the shore, they scarcely ran more risk of contamination than Admiral Bagshawe's daughters; and, taking into consideration the fact that they were virtually foreigners, one ought not perhaps to be too hard upon them for having found the scene both picturesque and diverting. With the reader's permission, we will once more pay a flying visit to the *Siren*, and station ourselves for a time as invisible spectators in the after part of that roomy vessel.

The sun has run his daily journey across a cloudless sky, and is dropping down towards his rest behind the western hills; the yacht lies motionless upon the glassy waters of the

bay; the various events of the day's programme have passed off—to borrow the expression of Mr. Pottinger, the mayor, who has just been on board to pay his respects—"without an 'itch;" and only the last of these—"a sculling race, to be rowed (weather permitting) in outrigged skiffs for a prize of twenty-five sovereigns, presented by Sir Frederick Croft, Bart."—remains for decision. Freddy, the originator and organizer of this rather hazardous competition, has gone off to take part in it; Geneviève, Claud and Nina Flemyng are leaning over the side, their field-glasses fixed upon the distant starting-point; Mr. Gervis is reclining in a wicker armchair, with eyes, as usual, half closed, while Mr. Flemyng, also as usual, is enjoying the monopoly of speech.

The heat of the weather has led Mr. Flemyng to supplement an ample luncheon by repeated draughts of champagne-cup; his countenance beams with benevolence and goodwill; the ever-flowing stream of his words rolls on with a certain acquired richness of utterance.

"Yes, Mr. Gervis, I believe that the benefits conferred upon England, in an unobtrusive way, by the system of an unpaid magistracy are beyond calculation. It is a peculiarly English institution. My impression is—and if

I am mistaken, your experience of foreign life will, no doubt, enable you to set me right—that there is nothing corresponding to it in other countries. In fact, I doubt whether you would find in any other country a class of men resembling that from which our county magistrates are chosen."

Mr. Gervis is understood to say that he is convinced that the class in question is unique.

"Well, we don't lay claim to much knowledge of law; that is not necessary; nor are we men of any great intellectual power—at least, the generality of us are not," says Mr. Flemyng, remembering one conspicuous exception to this rule; "but we have common sense and tact—yes, I think I may say that we have tact—and we understand the people with whom we have to deal. Which, you know, is half the battle. I was sorry you could not remain longer at our meeting the other day; still I dare say you heard enough to gain some rough idea of the working of the system."

"I think so," answered Mr. Gervis modestly. "And I assure you I was immensely diverted."

"Eh?"

"I say I was greatly edified. Some of the decisions struck me as most—remarkable."

"Ah, I am glad you were pleased. Cases

often come before us which demand something more than a mere competency to adjudicate upon the bare facts, if you understand what I mean. For instance, there was that charge of assault which you heard, and which very likely you thought that we dismissed rather cavalierly. The fact is, we knew perfectly well that severity would be misplaced there. The one man was really as much to blame as the other, and it was for the benefit of the whole parish, as well as for their own, that they should shake hands over it, and put an end to a long-standing quarrel. Then, again, there was another case which we dealt with in a different spirit; that of the man who was charged with shooting a partridge, as you may remember."

"Perfectly. It seems to have been an instance of singular depravity. One of your brother magistrates—the old clergyman with the very brilliant complexion—whispered to me that a man who would shoot a partridge in August would do anything."

"Ah, poor Turner, yes. One of the old school. A well-meaning man, but a little hasty and injudicious in his remarks sometimes. I need not point out to you that the offence *per se* was not a very grave one; and in fact Turner himself was for letting the prisoner off

with a severe reprimand and the smallest fine we could inflict; but I was firm with him. 'By no means,' I said. 'On the contrary, let it be the heaviest fine permissible and ten days' imprisonment in default. Burvill,' I said, addressing the prisoner, 'you are a notorious vagabond. This is not the first time that we have seen you here; and I suspect that you ought to have been brought up before us more often than you have been. Now——'"

"No relation to Tom Burvill, the fisherman, I hope," broke in Claud. "Tom has shown us many a good day's sport, and I should be sorry to hear of any one belonging to him getting into trouble."

"The father, I believe, of your friend," answered Mr. Flemyng, looking as if he did not much relish the interruption, "and, as I was saying, a notorious rogue and vagabond. He has been insolent to me personally upon more than one occasion; though of course I did not allow that circumstance to weigh with me. Well, I gave him to understand that, now that he was in our power, we intended to make an example of him; and I think the fellow's assurance was rather shaken when he heard the amount he would have to pay."

"That, I suppose," remarked Mr. Gervis

blandly, "was one of the cases which demand something more than a mere competency to adjudicate upon bare facts."

"Exactly so; and——"

"And did he pay?" asked Claud, interrupting again.

"Well, yes," answered Mr. Flemyng, rubbing the back of his head, with a movement of vexation; "I am sorry to say that he did. The man was removed, and I thought of course that he would be locked up; but somehow or other—whether he has stolen more than I gave him credit for, or whether he got a loan from his friends I can't say—the money was forthcoming, and so there was an end of it. I saw him loafing about on the beach this morning with a number of his lazy companions, and they made some coarse jest at my expense as I passed. These fishermen are an unruly and independent lot. They stand by one another, and manage to set authority at defiance in more ways than one; and as they all have a vote both for parliamentary and municipal elections, they are able, I regret to say, to bring a certain amount of pressure to bear upon the borough magistrates. It is a grievous scandal. Municipal reform, Mr. Gervis, is urgently needed both here and elsewhere.

The rate-payers of this town require to be roused to a sense, not only of their interests, but of their duty."

But Mr. Flemyng found it advisable to put off further remarks upon this important subject to some more favourable opportunity, perceiving that no one—not even Mr. Gervis—was listening to him. For now the first sculling race ever rowed in Beachborough bay had begun; and it was not on board the *Siren* alone that this novel contest was watched with breathless interest.

Four competitors only—the fittest survivors of a numerous entry—had the courage to assemble at the mark-boat, and were now urging their frail craft over the calm water. Besides Freddy himself, there was young Plummer (junior partner in the well-known firm of Plummer Sandham and Sons, wholesale and retail grocers, High Street, Beachborough, established 1750); there was a certain solicitor's clerk, Thomson by name; and finally there was Maltby, the brewer, a muscular youth belonging to that luckless betwixt-and-between class of which most country towns furnish a few samples—unfortunates whom wealth has deprived of their old companions, but has not as yet floated into the society of those who fancy

themselves their betters. Maltby, who rode straight to hounds, was a steady shot and a good bowler, had, by virtue of these excellences, earned a friend in Freddy Croft, for whose various small marks of attention he was so inordinately grateful that it was quite an open question whether he would be able to bring himself to win a race from his beloved patron.

As far as could be seen, however, he was not likely to have much choice in the matter. Freddy took the lead from the first, and drew away with long, easy strokes, leaving Plummer and Thomson more and more hopelessly in the rear every moment. The brewer, a more powerful man, but heavier and in less good condition, stuck to him pluckily; so that, to unpractised eyes, there was some semblance of a struggle; but Claud, who had been a wet-bob at Eton, knew that his friend could win as he liked.

"It is no race at all," said he, dropping his glasses, with a slight gesture of disappointment, at the end of the first round. "It's Croft first, and the rest nowhere."

"Oh, I hope he will win!" exclaimed Geneviève.

"I am not sure that I do. It is rather hard upon the others to ask them to start upon even

terms with an Oxonian; and that big man really has some notion of what he is about, though he will persist in feathering so near the water. Besides, doesn't it seem rather absurd to give a prize, and carry it off yourself?"

"Oh, but he does not mean to accept the prize," replied Geneviève promptly; "he is going to make the one who comes in second take it. And he would not have raced at all if they had not begged him so hard, and declared that none of them would start unless he did."

"It seems that you know all about it, Gen," remarked Claud. "Perhaps you can tell us who *is* to come in second."

Whereat Miss Flemyng laughs in that low, musical way that she has, which sounds enchanting to certain prejudiced ears, and ill-natured to others, no doubt equally prejudiced.

Meanwhile the scullers have rounded the east mark-boat for the second time; and what is the meaning of that murmur which rises, all of a sudden, from the beach, and swells into a general roar, amidst which certain articulate shouts, such as "Hooray, Maltby! Well rowed, Maltby!"—"Now, Sir Frederick, wake up, sir!" can be distinguished? Can it be a race after all? Sure enough, the brewer has made

a magnificent spurt. He is overtaking his leader—he has caught him—he is level with him. On board the *Siren* the excitement becomes intense, and everybody begins to speak at once. "He has passed him, I do believe!" "Not a bit of it; it only looks as if he had from where you are standing." "Freddy leads!" "No, he doesn't. Maltby leads." What is certain is that both men are doing their best, and that if Freddy bears away the prize, it will not be without having had a fight for it. Mr. Gervis remarks casually that he will take odds about the brewer's chance even now; and Miss Flemyng, with great presence of mind, immediately lays him thirteen pairs of gloves to a dozen on Freddy.

"Why, it's a thousand pounds to a penny on him!" cries Claud, forgetting his manners a little in the heat of the moment.

Nina observes quietly that it is never a thousand pounds to a penny on any event; but she little imagines what a speedy confirmation her assertion is to receive.

Nobody will ever know how it was that Freddy managed to get swamped within fifty yards of the winning-point. An absurd rumour was set about in Beachborough to the effect that he had done it purposely, not wishing to

win the race, and finding that he could not lose it; another theory laid the blame of the catastrophe upon one of those pestilent steam-launches, which came puffing up at that moment, to be in at the finish, raising the usual swell as it went; and there were even found some persons impertinent enough to allege that Sir Frederick lost his balance, and caught a crab. He himself avers that he has not the most distant idea of how it happened, and that all he can say is that it does not take a very great deal to upset an outrigger.

Whatever the cause of the mishap may have been, the consternation of the spectators on board Mr. Gervis's yacht, when their friend suddenly disappeared from view, may be imagined. Geneviève did not at first understand what was the matter; but when she realized that a distant object upon the water, which flashed as it caught the sun's rays, was Freddy's boat, floating bottom upwards, she could not repress a cry of alarm. "Oh, Claud, tell them to lower a boat at once. He will be drowned. Why don't they do something?"

"He is all right," returned Claud calmly. "Don't you see him swimming? Croft is amphibious. But he has lost his race, and Miss Flemyng has lost her gloves."

It was too true; and deep was Miss Flemyng's self-reproach on remembering that she had laid the odds on Sir Frederick instead of against the brewer. For, while Geneviève was watching the leisurely progress of a black head shorewards, and the sympathetic reception subsequently accorded to a dripping figure upon the shingle, the sculling championship and the purse of five-and-twenty sovereigns were being won after an unexpected fashion. Maltby, good man, was stronger in the arms than in the head, and the sight of his revered patron struggling in the water threw him into a panic as great as, and far more unreasonable than, Geneviève's. That he did not immediately cast himself in after the unfortunate competitor was only owing to a timely recollection that Freddy could swim like a fish; but he forgot all about the race, backed water, and remained motionless, gazing stupidly after the retreating swimmer, until something or somebody came splashing and snorting by him, and cheers, not unmingled with laughter, proclaimed the triumph of Plummer, Sandham and Sons. Well might Nina declare, with a stamp of her foot, that she would never touch another drop of that man's beer to the end of her life.

With this unsatisfactory victory the proceed-

ings of the day ended ; and half an hour later Geneviève was driving homewards behind a pair of cobs which had latterly been appropriated to her especial use. She was alone ; for Freddy, who had occupied the place beside her in the morning, and who had not been able to change his boating flannels, would not consent to ruin her cushions by sitting upon them in his saturated condition, and had reluctantly ensconced himself in a corner of the break which had borne away the rest of the party. Geneviève let her horses walk up the long hill. The evening was sultry, and the road ankle-deep in dust, and rapid motion seemed likely to entail discomforts of various kinds. So the quiet, well-fed cobs took things easily, straggling from one side of the road to the other, and stopping, every now and then, to stamp when the flies became particularly troublesome, while their driver, allowing the reins to hang loosely in her hand, indulged in a prolonged reverie.

Of what was she thinking, as she leant back in her low carriage, those melancholy eyes of hers fixed upon vacancy, and her whip absently flicking the overhanging growth of the hedges by the wayside ? Perhaps of the future, that endless subject of speculation for those who are

young enough to believe that the fulfilment of dreams lies hidden there ; perhaps of the present, which for young and old alike is mostly full of perplexities ; perhaps of nothing at all ; for on hot summer evenings, when little breezes just stir the leaves, and there is a sleepy hum of insects in the air, and all living things seem to cease from their daily toil, the mind will sometimes approach very nearly to that state of restful beatitude. Whatever may have been the subject of her musings, it could not have been altogether disagreeable ; for though her eyes kept their sad, dreamy look, a faint smile dawned gradually upon her lips and remained there. Moreover, she had noticed the passage of time so little that she was much surprised to find herself opposite the Southlands lodge, after having taken the best part of an hour to accomplish a distance of barely three miles.

She had gathered up her reins, and was preparing to turn in at the gate, when there appeared suddenly, from somewhere out of the twilight, the tall, spare figure of a man, who, striding forward, and laying one hand upon the side of the pony-carriage, announced in a hollow theatrical voice, "C'est moi!" Immediately after which he fell back in evident discomfiture, murmuring, "Mille pardons, mademoiselle!" and bowing down to the ground.

Geneviève paused, uncertain whether to drive on, and leave this bewildered stranger to his fate, or to ask him what he wanted. He was a narrow-shouldered man, in a tightly-buttoned, threadbare coat and dusty boots, who might or might not be a gentleman in reduced circumstances. His face was thin, drawn, and scored with deep lines, his light-blue eyes had an anxious, deprecating look, and there was a shrinking submission about his whole attitude, as he stood bare-headed by the way-side, which moved Geneviève to pity. While she was looking at him he seemed to gather fresh courage, and advanced a step or two with another low bow.

"Have I not the honour to address Miss Gervis?" he asked, in English.

Geneviève bowed.

"I have been waiting a long time in the hope of seeing the Princess Ouranoff: in this uncertain light, I mistook you for her at first, mademoiselle — a stupid error. May I inquire whether the Princess is living here at present?"

"She is not," Geneviève answered; "she is abroad." And then, perceiving the half-suppressed gesture of dismay with which the stranger received this intelligence, she added hesitatingly, "Can I do anything for you?"

He shook his head, muttering something about a matter of business, and a communication he had wished to make to the Princess, but looked so broken-hearted over it, and so ill and exhausted withal, that Geneviève could not find it in her heart to leave him.

"Mr. Gervis is at home. Would you not like to see him?" she suggested.

"Mr. Gervis—ah! Mr. Gervis," he echoed, speaking hardly above a whisper, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the dusty road. "Yes; I could see him. Perhaps, after all, it would be the best way—since one is driven to it. Yes: perhaps it would be best that I should see Mr. Gervis."

"I am sure it would," said Geneviève, encouragingly.

The fact was that she had taken the new comer's measure by this time. Persons resembling him were not unfrequent visitors in the Boulevard Malesherbes — distressed Russian noblemen, whom political or other misfortunes had reduced to want, and who relied upon a former acquaintanceship with the Princess Ouranoff, or simply upon the tie of a common nationality, to loosen her purse-strings for their benefit. Varinka was always amiable with these unfortunates. If her husband was away, she relieved

them out of her own pocket with so exquisite a grace that the smallness of the donation seemed a matter of secondary importance to its grateful recipients; but if, by any chance, Mr. Gervis happened at the time to be occupying his suite of rooms overhead, it was thither that they were requested to address themselves, and thence that they would shortly emerge, bearing with them a larger sum than they had counted upon, together with the memory of certain caustic speeches which freed them from any harassing sense of obligation. Geneviève knew that, whatever might be her father's faults, parsimony was not one of them, and had no fear that this poor wretch would be sent empty away from Southlands. Only, being still in some uncertainty as to his social standing, she debated within herself whether she ought to offer him the vacant seat in her pony-carriage or not. Another glance at his weary face turned the scale in his favour.

"If you will allow me, I will drive you up to the house," she said.

"Oh, mademoiselle, you are too good. I shall go very well on foot."

"But it is some distance," urged Geneviève, "and it is all up-hill. And you look tired."

The man wavered. "Yes, mademoiselle," he

answered, "I have had a long walk, and I am very tired, and——"

He did not end his sentence; but his face finished it for him so plainly with the words "very hungry" that there was no need for this humiliating admission to be put into language.

He did not require much more persuasion; and indeed, from the air of utter exhaustion with which he fell back upon the cushions and the violent fit of coughing which presently overtook him, Geneviève much doubted whether he would have been able to mount the hill without assistance. He scarcely spoke again, except to inform her that his name was Hirsch (not a very aristocratic one, to be sure), that he was, as she had surmised, a Russian subject, and that he had had the honour of knowing the Princess Ouranoff for many years; but she noticed that his hands were clean and white, like a gentleman's, and her woman's heart being touched by his forlorn aspect, she would have asked him to dine and offered him a room for the night, had she not feared that such an invitation might be subsequently ignored by her father.

Mr. Gervis, however, received the shabby stranger with his usual cold urbanity, and, to Geneviève's great relief, showed himself equal to the necessities of the occasion at all events in so far as meat and drink were concerned.

"We shall be sitting down to dinner in a quarter of an hour," he said. "Perhaps M. Hirsch will join us, and any little matter of business we may have to discuss can be deferred until afterwards."

So M. Hirsch was conducted upstairs to a dressing-room, whither, by Geneviève's directions, a servant presently brought him some wine and biscuits with his hot water.

CHAPTER XII.

HOSPITALITY.

HAVING acted the good Samaritan's part towards this wretched, half-starved Hirsch, having picked him up by the roadside, placed him in her own pony-trap and restored him with creature comforts, Geneviève naturally considered the man as in some sort her peculiar property, and began to feel herself drawn towards him, as the thrush does towards the helpless, intruding cuckoo whose life depends upon her care. She arranged that he should sit beside her at the dinner-table; she addressed her conversation to him, instead of to Freddy Croft, who was seated on her left hand; she tried to set him at his ease and to make him feel that he was admitted into the house as an equal, not upon sufferance only, as a beggar in disguise.

And this was the more creditable to her

because closer scrutiny and a brighter light revealed the stranger as a decidedly unprepossessing person. His cast of countenance was that of the habitual criminal. A retreating forehead, deep-set, colourless eyes, which winked and blinked perpetually, a certain undefinable covert impudence, veiled under an exaggerated humility of address—every detail of the man's manner and appearance, from his dust-coloured hair, cropped closely *à la brosse*, to his stooping shoulders and his crafty sidelong glance, seemed to breathe of penal servitude. But the worst thing about M. Hirsch was that in proportion as his outer man became refreshed with food and wine his humility showed signs of deserting him. He grew garrulous, praised Geneviève's costume, criticised adversely the style of dress in vogue among English ladies in general, let fall some observations about insular self-sufficiency, and interrupted Mr. Flemyng, who had been reading an article entitled "Constitutional Prerogative," and was giving a synopsis of the same for the benefit of the ill-informed, by a curt remark to the effect that the British monarchy was doomed.

"Sir," said Mr. Flemyng grandly, "when you are better acquainted with this country you will

discover that sedition is practically a thing unknown among us, and you will learn to abstain from language which in all classes of English society is apt to be resented as a personal affront."

This ought to have crushed him; but it did not. He shrugged his shoulders, with a short, disagreeable laugh. "The majority will always support institutions that exist," said he. "Once the sovereign is deposed and the constitution has fallen to pieces, the majority will be composed of very good republicans."

"The British Crown and the British Constitution will never fall," remarked Gervis solemnly, from the other end of the table. "We have Mr. Flemyng's word for it; and the subject is one which Mr. Flemyng has studied in all its bearings. Indeed, I have heard it whispered—though perhaps I ought not to say so—that the able article which he has been quoting is from his own pen."

"No, no, I assure you!" cried Mr. Flemyng, waving his hand deprecatingly, but looking vastly pleased. "There is ability in the article—great ability; and the writer's facts are indisputable and clearly put; but many of his deductions are such as I should hesitate to subscribe to. I have always been a Liberal

myself—I may add an advanced Liberal—possibly too advanced a one for the age. Still, I can conscientiously say that disloyalty of the nature suggested by Mr.—er—by your friend has never entered into my speculations for the future."

"One can't tell what Gladstone may do, though, if he gets the chance," observed Claud. "I confess I don't understand Mr. Gladstone."

"It is a common thing in these days," said Mr. Flemyng, raising his voice, "to hear men complain that they 'do not understand' Mr. Gladstone. Just so the Papal consistory 'did not understand' Galileo, the Athenians of old 'did not understand' Aristides, and, to come down to our own era, the English people of twenty years back 'did not understand' the Prince Consort. I would ask those who thus bring what they imagine to be an accusation whether the fault may not lie rather with their own comprehension than with the statesman whose intellect it fails to grasp. Of this they may rest assured, that when the history of the nineteenth century comes to be perused by generations yet unborn, the name of Gladstone will be seen written across it in letters of imperishable light, while those of many who now strut the world's stage, decked in the pride of

a brief authority, will have passed for ever into those shades of oblivion whither pretentious mediocrity and self-seeking timidity inevitably tend."

This noble peroration had the effect of causing subdued smiles and meaning glances to be interchanged all round the table; and Freddy Croft, who was drinking a glass of wine at the time, choked himself, and left the room with a hasty, unsteady step. The truth is that it was taken *verbatim* from the tag-end of a leading article, which some one had designedly left in a conspicuous place on the library table. It was an innocent pastime of Mr. Gervis's to lay traps of this kind for his loquacious neighbour, who, with a little management, could always be led to walk into them, and whom a love of high-sounding words would sometimes betray into eulogizing opposing men and measures almost in one and the same breath.

Geneviève on the present occasion lost the joke, her attention being engaged by M. Hirsch, who had dropped politics, and was discoursing glibly upon the manifold charms of the Princess Ouranoff.

"You are very fond of Madame la Princesse? Needless to say that, mademoiselle; who can resist her? So much beauty! so much elegance!

a heart so generous! For the rest, it is not surprising that she should possess your affection, having such exceptional claims of age and relationship. It is as if one should say a mother and a sister in one. Charming!"

"Is it long since you saw Varinka last?" asked Geneviève, not much pleased with M. Hirsch's familiarity, yet hardly knowing how to check it.

"Long? Oh yes, it is many years. But I have not been without news of my old friend. I say my old friend, because there was a time when I knew the Princess Ouranoff very well —intimately. I do not think that, when we meet again, she will need that I should tell her my name—oh no; I think she will not ask me to do that."

Something in the notion seemed to tickle him; for he laughed softly to himself, showing his sharp, discoloured teeth.

"But the time I speak of is long ago," he resumed presently. "The world goes round; friends part; new ties are formed. One does not forget the friends of former years; but one cannot always be with them. I have scarcely even seen the Princess since her second marriage; and curiously enough, mademoiselle, I have never until this evening beheld your papa."

"Except at Wiesbaden, in the summer of 1860," put in Mr. Gervis quietly.

The ex-diplomatist had a peculiar power of listening to two or more conversations at the same time. He had also a remarkable faculty of throwing his voice, so that he could make himself heard across wide intervening spaces. That languid voice travelled down the long table now with marvellous distinctness, and the effect of it was not only to cause the flush on M. Hirsch's thin cheeks to vanish very quickly, but also to arrest the tongues of the rest of the company, who doubtless felt some pardonable curiosity as to the antecedents of this out-at-elbows foreigner. Amid a general silence the stranger bent forward to face his host, his eyes blinking more rapidly than ever, and his features expressing innocent surprise.

"Mr. Gervis makes a mistake," he said. "I was never at Wiesbaden in all my life."

"That is curious," remarked Gervis; "because my memory so very rarely deceives me. I was misled, I suppose, by a strong resemblance, and also by the circumstance that the person whom I recollect was, like M. Hirsch, a Russian. I believe, though, now I come to think of it, that he did not bear the name of Hirsch—which, indeed, does not strike me as having a Slavonic ring."

"I am a Courländer by birth," said the other quickly.

"Ah, indeed? Mr. Flemyng, I am afraid I interrupted you in the middle of a most entertaining anecdote. Pray do not deprive us of the end of it."

A general hum of talk began once more; but poor M. Hirsch's peace of mind was evidently destroyed. He drank no more wine; he scarcely pretended to eat; he no longer addressed his neighbour familiarly, but in the timid, cringing manner which had at first aroused her pity. Looking more than ever like an escaped convict, he appeared to recognize in his host the detective who might at any moment ruin him by a word. And that terrible Gervis, perceiving this, amused himself by tormenting the unfortunate man, dropping upon him, when he least expected it, with some polite innuendo, some double-edged commonplace, the meaning of which, to Geneviève's ears, was clearly enough—"My good man, you are not simple enough to imagine that you can take me in, are you? Surely you don't suppose that I believe your name to be Hirsch, or that I am not acquainted with all the incidents of your disreputable career. Spare yourself the trouble of telling more lies; we understand one another.

You want money; I have plenty of it; and I know you are mean enough and hungry enough to allow yourself to be kicked while you pick up the gold."

Geneviève thought she understood it all, and her heart swelled with silent indignation. Her father's habit of gratifying his caustic humour at the expense of his guests seemed to her a breach of all the laws of honour and hospitality. She had never been able to derive any amusement from the spectacle of poor Mr. Flemyng egged on to make a fool of himself in public; and to make merry over fallen humanity by distributing simultaneous alms and insults was to her mind as sorry a sport as a gentleman could well indulge in. This luckless and unattractive Hirsch might very possibly be a rogue; but who could tell what his temptations might have been? He was at all events ill, weary and in want; and why should any one wish to degrade him further than need be? With such thoughts as these passing through her mind, Geneviève forgot the free-and-easy carriage of her neighbour which had offended her a little earlier in the evening, and by treating him thenceforth with marked friendliness, tried to make some amends for her father's lack of courtesy. And the man was not un-

grateful. When Geneviève rose to leave the room, he bent towards her, and said in a low voice, "You have been very kind to me, mademoiselle—to me, who am not accustomed to kindness. I shall not forget."

Along the south front of the house at Southlands runs a broad terrace walk, on which many benches and chairs are generally left; a walk to be avoided during the daytime, when the sun beats full upon it, but cool and pleasant when the night breezes blow up the valley from the sea, and fragrant with the scent of rose and sweet-briar, jasmine and mignonette. Thither, instead of to the drawing-room, the ladies betook themselves on this sultry night; and there they were joined, ere long, by three out of the five men whom they had left at the dinner-table. Poor Miss Potts, sitting disconsolately apart, wrapped in a gloomy reverie of which the subject may be divined by the reader, experienced a temporary return of cheerfulness when she saw Mr. Flemyng bearing down upon her. That great genius had lately discovered the veneration in which he was held by the humble lady-companion, and, in default of a better listener, sometimes deigned to favour her with one of his exhaustive disquisitions. The party divided itself quite naturally into

groups of two; for it had now become a matter of course that, upon every available opportunity, Freddy should pair off with Geneviève, and Claud with Nina.

The latter couple soon strolled away into the darkness, and were lost to sight. Silently they paced, side by side, along the gravel walks, past clumps of rhododendrons and azaleas, and across a broad space of sloping lawn. Their intimacy had reached that perilous stage in which long periods of speechlessness play so important a part. Halting at length beside the iron fence which separates the garden from the park, Nina dropped the opera-cloak which she had been carrying upon the topmost rail, and resting her bare arms upon it, abstractedly contemplated the shadowy prospect of hill, wood and valley that ended, far beneath her feet, in a vague fusion of sea and sky; while Claud turned his back upon the view, and, with folded arms, gazed at the gazer.

"Have you read those two volumes of poems I gave you?" he asked abruptly, after these respective attitudes had been maintained for several minutes.

"Yes," she answered, turning her head, so as to meet his eyes; "I have read them both over and over again."

"Really? You liked them then?"

"I thought them quite perfect. I don't know when I have read anything that delighted me so much."

"Do you say that to please me, or because you mean it?"

"Of course because I mean it. Have you not found out yet that I *always* mean what I say?"

"Well, I don't know," said Claud. "I suppose you find, as everybody else does, that it is impossible to practise an invariable sincerity without hurting some one's feelings; and after my having told you that the author of those lines was a particular friend of mine, you could hardly call them 'melodious twaddle,' could you?"

"Why not? Your friend might be the best fellow in the world, and a poor poet. But nobody, except an idiot, could possibly speak of his work in that way."

"Then the critic who devoted ten lines to 'Here and There' in the *Saturday Review* is an idiot. I must confess that I suspected as much before; but it is pleasant to have one's opinion confirmed. Miss Flemyng, if I were to let you into a great secret—a secret which I have never yet divulged to any one—do you think you could keep it?"

"I think," answered Nina demurely, "that I could."

"Well, then—I am trembling all over; but I made up my mind that I would tell you, and sooner or later the plunge must be taken—the author of those miserable little attempts at poetry was—myself."

"Oh, yes, I knew that," observed Nina composedly.

"*Did* you?" Claud was not a little mortified. "I feel exactly as if I had been trying to let off a damp firework," said he, making light of his discomfiture as best he could. "I thought I was going to astonish you, and now it is you who have astonished me. Would you mind telling me what made you guess that 'Clement Gerard' and I were one and the same person?"

"It was so difficult to guess, was it not?" returned Nina, laughing. "There are such numbers of people about who can write verses in French and English, and who bear the initials of C. G. And besides, I think I should always recognise any writing of yours," she added softly, laying just enough of emphasis upon the last word to send an agreeable thrill through the poet's whole person.

Claud had inherited from his Italian mother

a really magnificent pair of soft dark-brown eyes, the use of which, as a means of expressing things unutterable, he had only recently begun to discover. He now raised these speaking orbs to the grey ones of Miss Flemyng, who, I dare say, found it no less easy to read their language than she had done to put a name to the writer who disguised himself under the pseudonym of Clement Gerard. Another long period of silence was broken by Nina.

"Don't you feel very proud?" she asked.

"Of what? Of having found publishers willing to print my rubbish? They are wretched stuff, and nobody knows it better than I do; but, having launched them upon the world, I couldn't resist the temptation of showing them to you. And you did actually find some of them just readable?" hazarded Claud once more, with that mixture of self-depreciation and hunger for the praise of others which commonly characterizes young authors.

"I have read them lots and lots of times," answered Nina; "and I think they are very, very good—*awfully* good."

"Then I am more than satisfied," Claud declared. "I would rather have heard you say that than have seen my poor little book driven

into a second and third edition by the praise of all the critics in England."

"You think so now, perhaps; you won't think so this time next year."

The young man was going to protest; but Nina stopped him by lifting up one of her little hands. "Please don't swear that you will consider my good opinion the one thing in the world worth having as long as you live. It would be very nice if that sort of thing could be true; but unfortunately it can't, you know. The melancholy fact is that, a year hence—or, to be well within the mark, we will say two years hence—you will not care a straw whether I like your poems or not. More than that, I shall not care whether you care."

"That may be true as regards you; but not as regards me."

"Oh yes, it will; do you think I don't know? *Tout lasse, tout passe.* We are what we are, not what we should like to be; and perhaps, if the truth were known, it would be rather a bore to live in a world inhabited by unchangeable people. Anyhow, we both care this evening, which is the principal thing; and I want to hear all about your book. What made you publish it in two languages? I think I like the French version best."

"So do I," said Claud. "For want of something better to do, I used to scribble verses from time to time, when I was wandering about the world with the governor; and I always wrote in French, which is easier to me in composition than English — I suppose because I have learnt it more thoroughly. That simultaneous publication in both languages was a trick to attract the public. 'Par-ci, par-lá; par Clément Gérard,'—'Here and There; by Clement Gerard,'—I thought it would puzzle people, and make them wonder what nationality the gifted author could own. So, when I began to collect my stray songs and sonnets and what not, I did them into English *tant bien que mal*, with the result that you see. I am bound to say that the public has not as yet displayed as much agitation upon the subject as it might have done. My Paris publishers tell me that the first edition of the work is nothing like exhausted; and as for the London firm, I have not dared so much as to ask them how many copies of 'Here and There' remain on their hands after three months of patient advertising. They sent me, yesterday morning, the number of the *Saturday Review* in which my immortal work is summarily disposed of, among a host of others, under the heading of 'Minor Notices.'

Minor Notices indeed! isn't it scandalous? Of course I cut the page out, though; and here it is, if you would like to see it. 'Mr. Clement Gerard's little volume is one which it would be cruel to criticise too severely. In an age which witnesses the daily production of reams of twaddle calling itself poetry, one can but be thankful for such twaddle as will rhyme and scan . . . Mr. Gerard has evidently bestowed much pains upon his work; and, if he will in future devote as great a measure of his attention to matter as he has in this instance done to manner, he may—' etc., etc. Not a word about M. Clément Gérard, and his phenomenal command *utriusque linguæ*, you see. Somehow or other, that gun seems to have missed fire, and I don't even get the credit of twaddling agreeably for the benefit of two great nations."

"Have you got a light about you?" asked Nina. And, having hastily perused the brief notice by the aid of a wax match which Claud struck—"Now," said she, "I am going to burn the thing;" and promptly suited the action to the word.

"There! And I wish I could burn the fool of a reviewer into the bargain! I don't believe he ever read the poems at all. Don't let us waste another thought upon him. Why did you never tell me before that you wrote?"

"I was too timid," answered Claud. "I did not think it would interest you to hear that I had published some tenth-rate rhymes."

"How silly you are! If there is a thing I have a weakness for, it is genius; and oddly enough, I have never associated on anything like terms of intimacy with a single literary man, except Mr. Knowles, who sometimes writes for magazines, I believe, and who is anything but good company. I often meet him at dinners in London; and I have observed that he is invariably silent and rather shy until the champagne has been round twice; after which he becomes dictatorial, snubs his neighbours, and talks at such a pace that nobody else has a chance to get a word in edgeways."

(I am unwilling to break the continuity of the narrative; but really I cannot allow this abominable accusation, which Claud was so kind as to repeat to me subsequently, to pass without a protest. It is as false as it is impertinent; and were it not that I have never taken sufficient interest in Miss Flemyng to speak of her otherwise than with perfect impartiality, I might record certain speeches, made behind her back, which—but no matter. I apologize for the parenthesis, and proceed with my history, the

incidents of which I shall continue to report with passionless accuracy.)

"Mr. Knowles doesn't count," Nina went on; "he would never be anything but an old bore, even if he had written Paradise Lost or In Memoriam. But you are the first author whom I have known as a *friend;* and I can't, for the life of me, help feeling proud of you."

"It is delightful to hear you say so. Only you cannot really be proud of a friend who publishes mere twaddle."

"Nonsense! You know quite well your poems are not twaddle; they are lovely. What does Mr. Gervis say about them?"

"The Governor? Good gracious! you don't suppose that I should dare to show the book to him, do you? I can see him reading it, convulsed with internal laughter, but preserving an imperturbably grave face, and complimenting me upon my unsuspected talent. No; the authorship of 'Here and There' is a secret between you and me and the publishers; and please, I should like it to remain so. I shall never write any more doggerel."

"You will write some more poetry, I hope."

Claud shook his head. "It is a case of *non possumus*. If I ever do publish anything again, it shall be prose."

"What kind of prose do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. A novel, perhaps, or a play."

"That would be rather nice," said Nina thoughtfully. "I should enjoy being present on the first nights of your pieces. Yes; I think I should like you to be a successful playwriter."

There was a tacit assumption of proprietorship in this which Claud could not but feel to be flattering. "Perhaps I might be successful," he said, "if you wanted me to be so. At all events, with such an incentive, I would do the very best I could."

Miss Flemyng laughed under her breath; and Claud, in a slightly aggrieved voice, inquired the cause of her merriment.

"Oh, you will laugh too some day," she answered. "Hadn't we better be going back to tea now?"

Mentally recapitulating this conversation, some hours later, in the solitude of his chamber, Claud was vexed by many misgivings. He was not sure that the Saturday Reviewer's estimate of "Here and There" was an unjust one; he was not sure that he had done wisely in divulging his secret; he was disposed to think that he had talked a great deal too much

about his own affairs in the course of the evening.

> "And further, thinks I to myself, I'll be shot
> If I know whether Nina adores me or not,"

concluded the poet, paraphrasing Mr. Locker, as he blew out his candle, and got into bed.

END OF VOL. I.

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